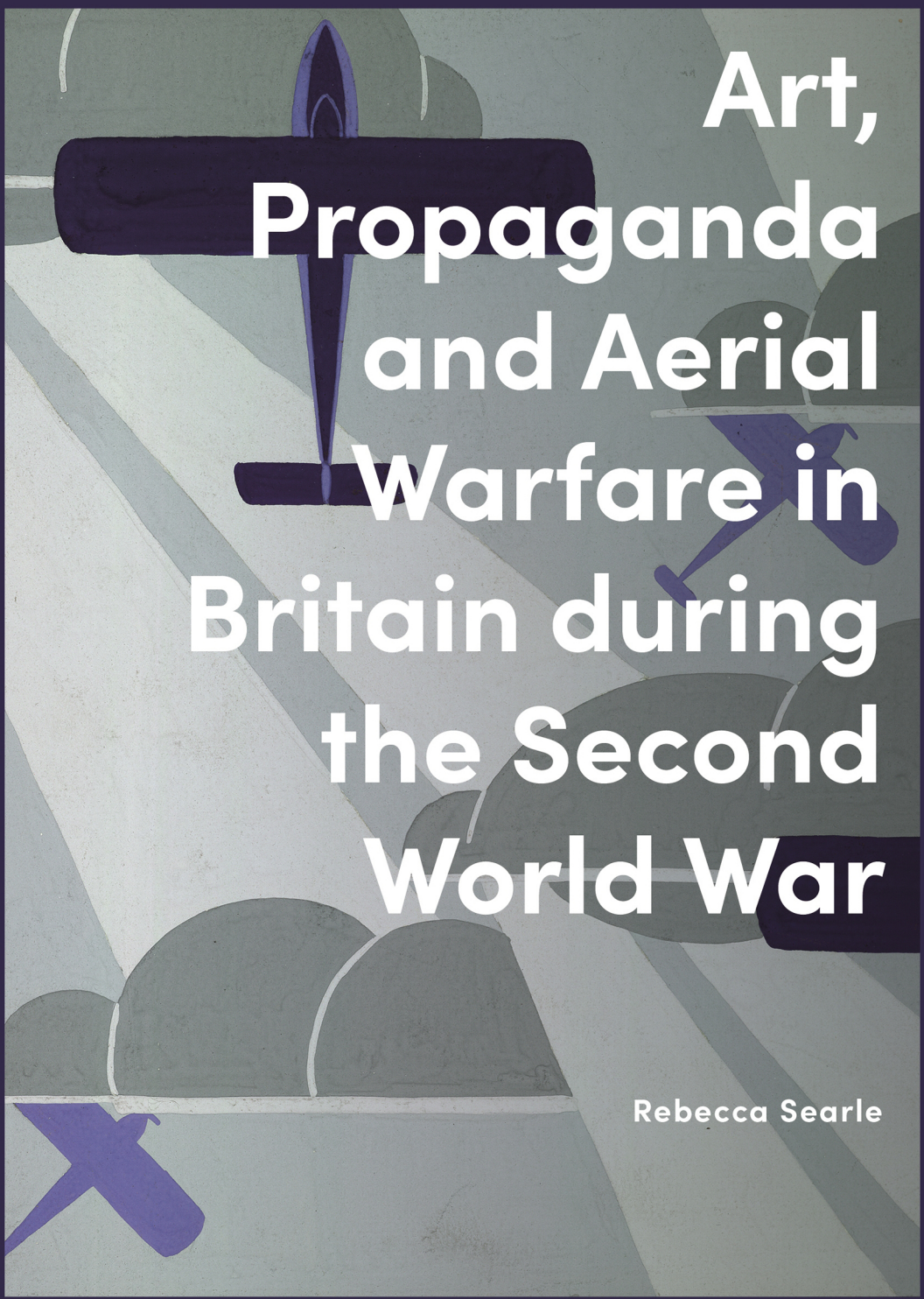

Art, Propaganda and Aerial Warfare in Britain during the Second World War

Rebecca Searle

NEW DIRECTIONS IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY

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Abbreviations

ARP	Air Raid Precaution(s)
BIAE	British Institute for Adult Education
CEMA	Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts
EMB	Empire Marketing Board
GPO	General Post Office
MAP	Ministry of Aircraft Production
MOI	Ministry of Information
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
WAAC	War Artists' Advisory Committee

Introduction

What did it look like? they will ask in 1981, and no amount of description or documentation will answer them. Nor will big, formal compositions like the battle pictures which hang in palaces; and even photographs, which tell us so much, will leave out the colour and peculiar feeling of events in these extraordinary years. Only the artist with his heightened powers of perception can recognise which elements in a scene can be pickled for posterity in the magical essence of style.[1]

Kenneth Clark

As the shadow of war descended upon Europe in August 1939, Kenneth Clark, the director of the National Gallery, was making plans to ensure the survival of British art. On the 23 August, he evacuated the Gallery's collection to the safety of Wales, where it was hoped it would remain out of the bombers' reach. As the paintings were being carefully packed, Clark was aware that the conflict threatened more than just the nation's artistic past. As Britain focused its entire resources on the war effort, suspending all non-essential activities for the duration, opportunities for artists to continue to practise would be few and far between. Artists were not on the Schedule of Reserved Occupations and many would be conscripted into active service. To ensure the continued production of art, Clark approached the Treasury with a proposal to employ official war artists. His aim, he recalled, was 'simply to keep artists at work on any pretext, and, as far as possible, to prevent them from being killed'.[2] After some debate, Clark's scheme was approved and in November 1939 the War Artists' Advisory Committee (WAAC) met for the first time, charged with creating an artistic record of the war on behalf of the state.[3] Over the next six years they amassed one of the largest ever collections of official war art, consisting of nearly 6,000 works by more than 400 artists: a unique source for future generations.

Historians have long appreciated the aesthetic qualities of war art, and images from the collection often feature on book covers and colour plates.[4] However, the art is used only for illustrative purposes and is not subject to the levels of analysis afforded to other types of source material.[5] Angus Calder's *Myth of the Blitz,* for instance, features several works from the collection as plates in the central section. While Calder devotes ten pages to the poetry of the period and a whole chapter to both fiction and film, he spends just a couple of paragraphs discussing art and does not even mention the WAAC. Brian Foss provides the only comprehensive study of the committee in *War Paint*, where he positions the activities of the WAAC within the history of British art.[6] The focus of this book is different. It locates the collection within the broader cultural landscape of wartime Britain to further understand the artistic record bequeathed

by the WAAC and explore the ways in which art can contribute towards our broader understandings of the Second World War.

The First World War set an important precedent in Britain for the state sponsorship of war art. Although it was not until 1917 that official artists were first sent to the front, the works they produced, such as Paul Nash's *The Menin Road* and C. R. W Nevinson's *The Harvest of Battle*, quickly became a key component in popular imaginings of the conflict.[7] Exhibitions of war art introduced a new public to modern art; Kenneth Clark, for instance, recalled that a visit to the Royal Academy in 1917 had a profound influence on his artistic sensibilities: 'it was with this exhibition still in my mind that, on the first day of the war, in 1939, I went round to the Treasury to ask if I might be allowed to submit plans for a similar scheme.'[8] Clark was aware that some might now question the value of art as record, given the advances in film and photography in the intervening years. He argued that the merit of the First World War collection was that it left 'a record of the war which the camera could not have given. There are certain things in life so serious that only a poet can tell the truth about them.'[9]

Questions as to the value of an artistic record in an age of film and photography hampered the WAAC throughout its existence and shaped the understanding of war art developed by the committee. Every explanation they advanced defined the war artist in opposition to the camera. Each of their publications was prefaced with the quotation from Clark, which I started this introduction with. Only the artist, it was claimed, could document 'the colour and peculiar feeling of events in these extraordinary years'.[10] This domain is reminiscent of what Raymond Williams described as the structure of feeling: 'a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or period'.[11] For Ben Highmore, 'the shape and texture of social experience is often best grasped as a pattern of feeling and mood', which has the 'quality of being both generally felt and specifically articulated'.[12] It was this lived and felt dimension of social experience that Clark argued eluded the camera's plate. Only the artist could 'penetrate below the surface' to record 'the deeper levels of experience'. The war artist was urged to 'convince the spectator that the thing has been experienced as well as seen' and present their 'experience as an integrated whole'.[13] The committee recognized that each artists' experience was of course subjective, 'for though every man sees with his eyes approximately what his neighbour sees, every man's thought is a complex world different from his neighbour's and, until he has given utterance to it, hidden from his neighbour'. Yet, at its best, when record becomes symbol, it 'enables the artist's soul … to hobble about amongst other souls and explain itself to them', communicating the deepest levels of wartime experience.[14] In the photographic age, the war artist was asked to not only communicate their individual experience but 'pickle for posterity' something of the more amorphous but socially shared pattern of mood and feeling in those extraordinary years.

The collection, however, remained *official* war art, and this meant that the state had certain expectations of the WAAC. The committee received its funding from the Ministry of Information (MOI), who were charged with monitoring and maintaining morale, a concept contemporaries struggled to define. Morale was understood to manifest itself in both attitudes and behaviours, 'measured not by what a person thinks or says, but by what he does and how he does it'.[15] Good morale was therefore 'not

only determination to carry on, but also determination to carry on with the utmost energy'.[16] For Ben Highmore, what they were grasping at was something akin to the national mood or feeling and the MOI tasked essentially with 'mood management'.[17] Its remit was 'to guide habit and opinion in directions favourable to the policy and aims of the Government'.[18] Through the production of propaganda, the MOI sought to encourage people to learn new ways of acting and understanding to make sense of their individualized experiences in ways conducive to the maintenance of the war effort. The aims of the WAAC were therefore very much at odds with its parent organization. While the WAAC existed to record the experience of war, the MOI was tasked with shaping and reworking that experience. As Chapter 1 explores, this did not lead to harmonious relations between the organizations, particularly after the Ministry threatened to remove funding if the war artists did not contribute more fully to the propaganda war. The fact that the WAAC survived at all is testament to the influence that Clark wielded among the highest echelons of government.

Kenneth Clark chaired the WAAC throughout its existence. He was a leading figure in the British art world, appointed in 1934, aged just thirty-one, as both Surveyor of the King's Pictures and Director of the National Gallery. Educated at Winchester and Oxford, he moved in powerful circles. His autobiographies are crammed with references to social events with figures such as Churchill, Chamberlain, Phillip Sassoon and, on occasion, the royal family.[19] Like many of his class, when war broke out, Clark found employment in the new wartime administration as 'the cult of the amateur reached its apogee'.[20] Clark himself confessed that he had no qualifications for his first role as Director of the Film Division of the MOI: 'In those days films were spoken of as "pictures", and I was believed to be an authority on pictures. I had no qualifications for the job, knew absolutely nothing about the structure of the film world.'[21] Nevertheless, he was promoted in April 1940 to Controller of Home Publicity. In this role, he played a key part in defining the dynamics of domestic propaganda during the crucial months of Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain and the Blitz. Clark brought his own agenda to the WAAC, as Brian Foss has observed.[22] He was concerned that the depression of the art market in the interwar years was not a blip but pointed to the longer-term decline in art's traditional sponsors and patrons, the independently wealthy leisured class. Clark hoped to use the opportunity presented by war to renegotiate the relationship between art, the state and the public to secure the future of artistic practice in the post-war years. He wanted to use the WAAC to educate public taste, democratize access to fine art and persuade the state to accept a responsibility to support artistic practice.

This book explores the interplay between the different demands placed upon the WAAC. Although the production of propaganda seems at odds with both the WAAC's aspiration to record the lived experience of war and Clark's ambitions to revive artistic practice, as Chapter 1 outlines, the development of new forms of cultural propaganda, Clark's penchant for romantic forms of art and the particular ways in which propagandists projected Britain at war meant that these roles were in many ways complementary. The following chapters evaluate the artistic record bequeathed by the WAAC. I consider the ways in which the different demands made of war art shaped collecting practices and assess the degree to which the committee succeed in their ambition to document the lived and felt dimensions of social experience. This

necessitates breaking intra-disciplinary boundaries. Mood and feeling belong to the totality of social experience, as Williams reminds us: 'We examine every element as a precipitate, but in the lived experience of the time every element was in solution, an inseparable part of a complex whole.'[23] The approach in these chapters has therefore been to move between analysis of art and the social, cultural, economic, technological and military histories of the period. In so doing, the book demonstrates the ways in which analysis of visual sources can enrich a range of historical practices.

The book draws heavily on Mass Observation, whose aims were in many ways analogous to the WAACs. Founded in 1937, amid the crisis engendered by the abdication of Edward VII, Mass Observation aimed to create an 'anthropology of ourselves', a record of the thoughts, feelings and everyday lives of ordinary people. It employed a team of investigators to observe the conversations and behaviour of the people and recruited a panel of volunteers who were to keep diaries and answer questions posed by the organization. For founders Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson, these observers were 'the cameras with which we are trying to photograph contemporary life'. They were imagined as '*subjective* cameras, each with his or her own individual distortions. They tell us not what society is like, but what it looks like to them.'[24] Through this multiplicity of perspectives, Mass Observation aspired to capture something of the 'social consciousness', especially during momentous events such as the abdication, the coronation and, of course, the Second World War: 'At such times, our observers will each be watching the social reactions within their own local environment. They will be the meteorological stations from whose reports a weather map of popular feeling can be compiled.'[25] In wartime, more emphasis was placed on historical record. In August 1940, observers were asked to send in further reports on 'your own opinion of general feeling and people's attitudes'. This, they were told, 'is quite definitely going to prove of first class importance when the time comes to write a history of this war'.[26]

Mass Observation recognized that it did not have access to unmediated experience. Social consciousness, they argued, was daily 'modified by the news reported in the newspapers and on the wireless'.[27] For historians such as E. P. Thompson, this interplay between a lived and felt experience and the cultural frameworks through which individuals make sense of those experiences is at the heart of the experiential, which lies 'half within social being, half within social consciousness'.[28] Unmediated experience is momentary. Once a person starts to reflect on what has just happened to give meaning to their experience, or tries to communicate this to others, let alone record it with an eye to posterity, experience is storied through cultural frameworks. As Claire Langhamer argues, one of the real values of Mass Observation is that it gives the historian insight into this process. The material is 'threaded through with subjective understandings of social worlds … . It offers access to the ways in which historical actors adapted, utilized, or disregarded discursive constructions within their own spheres of existence.'[29] This book explores this process to consider the ways in which propaganda and experience were mutually constitutive.

This book focuses on the air war: a central and defining experience of the Second World War. Throughout the 1930s, the aeroplane dominated the imagined future war. The sporadic air raids of the First World War gave a terrifying prelude of the shape of things to come, but were ultimately limited by the technological capacities

of early aircraft. Rapid advances in the interwar years were powerfully demonstrated during the Spanish Civil War, fuelling popular fears of a future air war in the skies above Britain. The government's own anxieties ensured that the RAF were prioritized in rearmament. Great efforts were made to develop the necessary capacity to produce aircraft in the numbers required, and by 1943, the aircraft industry was the largest employer in Britain. Chapter 2 examines how the WAAC represented aircraft production. It maps how the industrial propaganda strategy shifted according to the needs of industry and explores the ways in which war artists became involved in these campaigns.

After the Fall of France in June 1940, the Luftwaffe began a heavy assault on the British Navy and Air Force. In the popular imagination, the fighter plane and its pilot appeared to be all that stood in the way of invasion. The men of the RAF were soon crafted into modern heroes. Chapter 3 considers how the WAAC represented Fighter Command. Focusing on the work of Eric Kennington, the chapter explores the construction of the heroic character during the Second World War and the tensions this engendered with the wider presentation of an egalitarian people's war.

From August 1940, the Luftwaffe turned its attention to British towns and cities. The Blitz lasted until the spring of 1941 when Hitler made the decision to focus his forces in the East. Sporadic raids continued until the end of the war – increasing in intensity from 1944 with the introduction of the V1 and V2 rockets. Aerial bombardment was the primary way the British civilian population experienced the violence of war. Chapter 4 considers how the WAAC represented the Blitz. Both British and German military strategies were based on the assumption that civilian morale could be broken by aerial bombing. This meant that the management of civilian responses to air raids was a mainstay of the MOI's work. The images they crafted of the heroic stoicism of ordinary citizens and the degree of national communality fostered under fire have proved enduring; however, as Ben Highmore has pointed out, if 'the major work of morale was to produce the "conditions of feeling" that could cope with constant catastrophe, it actively removed the conditions of feeling that could narrate the moment when morale no longer worked, when the soul collapsed'.[30] This chapter explores the degree to which these submerged narratives of Blitz life found expression in war art.

While the narrative of the Blitz remains central to contemporary notions of Englishness, popular accounts of the war often overlook the fact that Britain was not just a victim of aerial violence, but an enthusiastic perpetrator. After the withdrawal from the continent, the bomber was the primary means by which Britain could take war to the enemy heartland. While propagandists understood that it was vital to present Britain as a power actively engaging the enemy to secure victory, after characterizing the German bombing of Britain as barbaric, it was impossible to be truthful about the nature of British bombing strategy, particularly in regard to the area bombardment of cities and the deliberate targeting of civilian morale. Chapter 5 explores how the WAAC represented this most contentious aspect of the conflict and finds that war art, like other official representations of the campaign, maintained the pretence that the RAF struck only legitimate military and industrial targets. There was, however, one significant exception to this. Paul Nash's *Battle of Germany* provides one of the frankest

official representations of the true consequences of British bombing, which, as the conclusion outlines, anticipated the more violent and despairing tone that British art would adopt in the post-war period as artists struggled to make sense of the extreme brutality of war.

Exploring the Second World War through the lens of art opens new perspectives on the broader social and cultural history of the conflict. This book builds on the work of Ian McLaine, Jo Fox and James Chapman to deepen understandings of the propaganda war.[31] Chapter 1 highlights the continuities between forms of cultural propaganda developed in the interwar years and the approaches that dominated during the conflict. More broadly, rather than understanding 1939 as a rupture, the book embeds its analysis of wartime culture in a longer time frame to appreciate both the tropes propagandist sought to displace, such as the allegations of incompetency levelled against the aircraft industry, as well crucial cultural continuities, as seen in the representation of the RAF. Historical explorations of the propaganda war have tended to focus on film, which can limit our understanding of the broader thrust of propaganda. The sheer volume of works acquired by the WAAC enables a greater appreciation of the subtle shifts in propaganda strategy that occurred as the war progressed. By mapping industrial propaganda against shifts in the war economy, Chapter 2 demonstrates the ways in which propagandists were highly responsive to shifting material circumstances.

Not all elements of the war found representation in films. While films about Bomber Command are plentiful, Fighter Command appeared far less often on the big screen. In contrast, the force was well represented by WAAC artists and this enables a more thorough exploration of the complexities of the construction of the heroic character during the Second World War. This analysis, in Chapter 3, reveals key fractures in the official presentation of Britain at war and the contradictions in dominant forms of wartime masculinity that Sonya Rose and Martin Francis have alluded to.[32] The RAF's Directorate of Public Relations sought to present the men of Fighter Command within traditional heroic modes; however, in terms of social class and the forms of masculinity exuded, these modes of representation fitted ill within the wider presentation of an egalitarian people's war. Kenneth Clark instead encouraged artists to craft the idea of the ordinary hero, but the failure of these images to resonate with the public is a reminder that not all propagandist constructions were successful.

This book also contributes to the growing body of literature on the history of emotions. Work by Amy Bell, Joanna Bourke and Lucy Noakes has highlighted the importance of feelings to broader understandings of the social and cultural history of the conflict.[33] Although emotions are generally seen as belonging to the private sphere, during the Second World War, they became of great concern to the state. As Chapter 4 explores, the government's fear that emotional responses to air raids might bring about a critical break in morale meant that the state went to great lengths to try and manage and regulate popular feeling. This created a regime in which commonly felt experiences such as fear were difficult to articulate within normative ideas of good citizenship. This book therefore focuses on the interplay between emotion and prescriptions of wartime citizenship. More broadly, it interrogates the ways in which experience and representations were mutually constitutive. While submerged

narratives of the conflict, such as fear, death, the destruction of home and the levels of British violence over the towns and cities of Germany find scant representation in most official presentations of the British at war, the ability of artists to obliquely hint at these experiences meant that these submerged narratives of the conflict were inscribed across the WAAC's collection. Analysis of war art can therefore significantly enhance our broader understanding of the social and cultural history of the Second World War.

1

The War Artists' Advisory Committee, cultural propaganda and romantic art

In October 1939, as preparations were being made to establish the WAAC, Kenneth Clark gave a talk on the radio on the role of art in wartime. He argued that artists should be employed to produce records and not propaganda, as such work threatened to 'coarsen' the artists' style and 'degrade his vision'.[1] Throughout its existence, the WAAC sought to distance itself from the work of the MOI. Its 1942 annual report, for example, stated: 'We wish to make it clear that although the use of the pictures for propaganda in a wide sense looms large … we have not forgotten that our chief task is to build up for posterity a collection of artistic records of the highest quality.'[2] The committee foregrounded its role as a recorder and relegated propaganda to a merely incidental function of the committee. This did not lead to a harmonious relationship between the WAAC and the MOI, who, on several occasions, attempted to disband the WAAC.[3]

The value of the committee's work was first questioned when it applied for a renewal of its funding in the autumn of 1940. The Treasury hesitated and stated that they were not 'convinced that the production for posterity of an artistic record of England at war is either essential for the effective prosecution of the war or a proper function of a purely wartime department'.[4] In this instance Frank Pick, the director general of the MOI, rallied to the WAAC's defence and more funding was secured. This was not to be the end of the matter. In February 1943, officials from within the MOI sought to remove the WAAC from the Ministry. They argued that

> the war artists are recorders, not propagandists. As such, their work seems to fall … outside the Ministry altogether. This has always been recognised so far as the written history of the war is concerned, and we successfully resisted an attempt by the War Cabinet Offices to saddle us with responsibility for a film record of the war. Why should pictures be a different case?[5]

After this further worsening of relations between the two organizations, the WAAC left their offices within the MOI's Senate House and moved to the National Gallery in July 1943. This spatial separation did not fully resolve the relationship and doubts as to the value of the committee continued to fester. Only through the direct intervention of Brendan Bracken, the Minister of Information, was funding secured for the rest of the war. Once again, the survival of the WAAC was ensured through the support of high

ranking officials within the MOI. Why was it that individuals such as Frank Pick and Brendan Bracken rallied to the defence of the beleaguered WAAC?

This chapter suggests that in the particular conjuncture of the Second World War, the production of propaganda and the creation of an artistic record were not antithetical. The emergence of new forms of cultural propaganda in the interwar period set a precedent for using art to promote a positive idea of the nation. Such approaches were particularly powerful during the war when Britain sought to define itself against a Nazi state who exercised total control over cultural production. Moreover, the romantic styles of art favoured by the committee accorded with the broader propagandist project of the nation at war. In this context, record and propaganda were in many ways complementary.

The development of cultural propaganda

In his defence of the WAAC in 1940, Pick argued that propaganda and culture 'should be combined. They are properly related if propaganda is good'.[6] This assertion reflected the new ideas about propaganda that emerged in the 1930s and were pioneered in organizations such as the Empire Marketing Board (EMB), the GPO, the London Passenger Transport Board and the British Council.[7] The approaches developed were a reaction against the extensive propaganda campaign waged by the British state during the First World War. Although highly successful at the time, during the interwar period books such as Arthur Ponsonby's *Falsehood in Wartime* detailed how the government had manipulated the population with doctored photographs, falsified documents and exaggerated tales of enemy atrocities.[8] This left both domestic and foreign audiences suspicious of overt forms of propaganda. In the interwar period, propagandists, such as Stephen Tallents of the EMB and GPO and Rex Leeper of the British Council advocated more subtle forms of persuasion. They suggested that rather than adopting a derogatory anti-foreign tone, efforts should be concentrated on the projection of a positive image of Britain.[9] Direct exhortations were to be avoided and material should be produced with the 'utmost artistry'. These organizations therefore enlisted contemporary artists to produce 'background propaganda' and promote a favourable idea of the nation through its cultural products.[10] Kenneth Clark sat on the GPO's Poster Advisory Group, and Edward Bawden, Duncan Grant and Stanley Spencer were among those who produced posters for the organization during the 1930s. The EMB and the GPO also had their own film units and here, under the leadership of John Grierson, the talents of pioneering documentary film makers including Humphrey Jennings, Harry Watt and Len Lye were nurtured.[11] Artistic practice was therefore integral to the new forms of cultural propaganda that were developed in the 1930s.

Many of the key individuals involved with the interwar development of propaganda found their way to the MOI. Stephen Tallents, who had been secretary of the EMB and Public Relations Officer at the GPO, was appointed in 1936 as director general-designate at the MOI, where he was responsible for planning and defining the remit of the nascent propaganda department.[12] Although he was dismissed in 1939, further continuity was established when Frank Pick, who had served on the Publicity

Committee of the EMB, was appointed as director general of the MOI. The GPO film unit was also co-opted into wartime propaganda. In 1940 it became the Crown Film Unit and over the next five years produced more than eighty films for the MOI. It is hardly surprising then that the techniques pioneered during the 1930s came to define British wartime propaganda.

These approaches were particularly suited to the contours of the Second World War. By 1939, it was well known that Germany had developed an extensive propaganda machine. Overt forms of propaganda were therefore more closely associated with the totalitarianism that Britain was fighting against than the democratic values they were fighting for.[13] The memory of Britain's extensive campaign during the First World War remained strong, and audiences both at home and abroad remained resistant to obvious propaganda.[14] Officials within the MOI recognized that propaganda would not work if it was blatant.[15] For example, Kenneth Clark, in his role as the director of the Film Division, argued that 'film propaganda will be most effective when it is least recognisable as such'. Official films, he advised, should appear to inform or entertain, rather than persuade. Where possible, films should be made by existing commercial organizations and 'the influence brought to bear by the Ministry on the producers of feature films … must be kept secret'.[16] Across all mediums it worked, the Ministry strove to disguise its input.[17] It harnessed the BBC, the popular press and publishers such as Penguin and Oxford University Press. Even when it was not directly involved, the Ministry exerted tremendous influence over all wartime cultural production as it had the power to secure extra stocks of paper and film and actively worked through official and unofficial channels to shape the ways in which the press reported and interpreted events.[18] For the historian, it is hard to draw any firm boundary between official propaganda and other forms of cultural production.

The influence of the new approaches to propaganda can also be detected in the way that the war was presented. Interwar propagandists had argued that the effects of negative propaganda were limited, and efforts should instead be focused on the creation of a positive image of Britain and the essential virtues the nation embodied. This is not to say that Nazi Germany was not denigrated during the war, but for each indictment levied against the Germans, a powerful and oppositional virtue was invested in Britain and its people. Angus Calder has helpfully summed up the key elements of this presentation, as shown in Table 1.1.

Nazi Germany was projected as a highly militarized and regimented society which was determined to aggressively conquer Europe and destroy the very foundations of civilization itself.[19] As the film *Britain at Bay* (1940) described, 'Nazi Germany was determined to flourish … by ruthless aggression and conquest. Its vast military machine was created at the expense of all the decencies and amenities of civilised life.'[20] In contrast, and ignoring much of nation's recent imperial history, Britain was presented as essentially peace-loving and dedicated to the defence of civilized and Christian values, such as freedom, democracy and tolerance. While war had not been sought, now that it had come it would be prosecuted with the utmost vigour for, as *Picture Post* proclaimed, 'we are fighting for a way of life … we are taking up arms to preserve the rights of free speech and opinion for which our fathers struggled, and to keep the road towards total freedom open for our sons … This is indeed a war for all we

Table 1.1 The Presentation of Britain and Germany at War

Britain	Germany
Freedom	Tyranny
Improvisation	Calculation
Volunteer Spirit	Drilling
Friendliness	Brutality
Tolerance	Persecution
Timeless Landscape	Mechanisation
Patience	Aggression
Calm	Frenzy
A thousand years of peace	The 'Thousand-Year Reich' dedicated to war

Source: Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, 196.

are.'[21] So important was this crusade that, the propagandists maintained, it overrode all previous divisions in society and the nation stood as one, unified in battle. This was a people's war, where each and every member of the national community was a member of a great citizen army dedicated to victory and motivated by voluntarism rather than harsh German military discipline. The war was therefore sharply delineated into an ideological battle. It was a war between freedom and tyranny, and democracy and totalitarianism. It was a conflict between civilization and barbarism – a battle between good and evil.[22]

One way in which this distinction could be made was through the juxtaposition of each state's attitude towards cultural production. In Germany, the Reichskammer der bildenden Künste exercised strict control, confiscating all art that was deemed inconsistent with Nazi ideology. Many of the seized works were displayed at the 1937 Munich exhibition of Degenerate Art and this event was widely reported across the world.[23] This repression of artistic freedom was a potent symbol of the wider suppression of freedom in Nazi Germany. An article in the *Times*, for example, criticized these attempts to 'adulterate the arts by saddling them with a political purpose' and argued that 'the fundamental falseness of Nazidom is expressed in its treatment of the arts'.[24] The appearance that the British state sponsored free artistic expression was therefore valuable propaganda in itself.

Art was also valuable in giving substance to the abstract ideas the nation was fighting for. Cultural organizations often highlighted this. In 1939, when the Board of Education applied for funding to found the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), it argued:

> We are engaged in a war to defend civilisation. Such a policy can only have meaning if the people behind it believe intensely in the value and reality of their own cultural roots. It might be possible to make the country aware that its traditions are indeed bound up with conceptions of democracy, tolerance and kindliness. These things have little meaning in the abstract but are actual and concrete when expressed through national literature, music and painting: and such consciousness might become the spearhead of national effort, both as a weapon of war and as a means of implementing a constructive peace.[25]

It was therefore essential to 'show publicly and unmistakably that the Government cares about the cultural life of the country. This country is supposed to be fighting for civilization and democracy and if these things mean anything they mean a way of life where people have liberty and opportunity to pursue the things of peace. ... Such an assurance needs to be given equally for the sake of our own people and for the sake of British pride abroad.'[26] One way in which this could be done was by showcasing the activities of the WAAC.

Between 1941 and 1944, a series of exhibitions were sent to America, Canada, Central and South America, the West Indies, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. These exhibitions presented an opportunity to deploy a form of low-key propaganda when more overt forms would not have been acceptable. America was particularly hostile to propaganda. It was popularly believed that during the First World War America had been duped out of neutrality and drawn into a European War by British propaganda. In the face of such strong feelings, the British government pledged not to wage another campaign of this sort, yet American support remained vital to the successful prosecution of the war. Whereas overt forms could not be used, more subtle cultural propaganda could be deployed by the British, without being seen to have reneged on their pledge.[27] The first WAAC exhibition, *Britain at War*, opened in New York in May 1941. The catalogue described the collection as 'a defiant outpost of culture' and stressed that in 'defending a civilisation there should be as little dislocation or abandonment of the civilising arts as possible, and as much continuance and preservation as we can possibly afford'.[28] Opening the exhibition, Lord Halifax pronounced that the 'artist maintains his right to exercise his imagination in a free country even in wartime'.[29] Most of the pictures shown at this exhibition were painted during the phoney war and were therefore not obviously warlike. In the introduction to the catalogue, Herbert Read turned this into an advantage:

> It must … be remembered though the English are energetic in action, they are restrained in expression. Our typical poetry is lyrical, not epical or even tragic. Our typical music is the madrigal and the song, not the opera and the symphony. Our typical painting is the landscape. In all these respects war cannot change us, and we are fighting this war precisely because in these respects we refuse to be changed. Our art is the exact expression of our conception of liberty: the free and unforced reflection of all the variety and eccentricity of the individual human being.[30]

Not only was the existence of the WAAC used as evidence of the nation's commitment to freedom and civilization, but the art itself was presented as an embodiment of the 'way of life' Britain was fighting for. In contrast to the Nazi's repression of artistic freedom and in the face of growing suspicion to more overt forms of propaganda, new forms of cultural propaganda, such as war art, were important persuasive tools.

Romantic art and Englishness

The WAAC presented itself as an impartial body that imposed no doctrine of official art. Sitting on the committee, alongside various representatives from the Ministries

and Services, were individuals associated with a range of schools of art: Muirhead Bone represented the Imperial War Museum; P. H. Jowett, the Royal College of Art; Randolph Schwabe was from the Slade; and Sir Walter Russell was the Keeper of the Royal Academy Schools. Clark justified this selection at the time by claiming that these members would 'fairly represent different shades of artistic opinion'.[31] In retrospect, Clark confessed that 'different interests were seen to have been looked after. That's to say Russell didn't look after the interests of the Royal Academy at all.'[32] The idea of impartiality was therefore by and large illusory and Clark, who chaired the committee throughout its existence, dominated proceedings.

The WAAC had three different means by which they acquired images. A handful of artists were given a full-time commission and attached to the Admiralty, the War Office, the Air Ministry, the Ministry of War Transport or the MOI itself. Other artists were given commissions for specific subjects and offered short-term contracts. Submissions were also encouraged from both professional and amateur artists. In these ways the WAAC amassed a collection of war art that Clark boasted 'comes very near to being a cross-section of modern English painting'.[33] Nevertheless, there were some exceptions. Clark explained that although he regretted the exclusion of painters such as Ivon Hitchens, Ben Nicolson and Victor Pasmore, the collection could not include 'pure painters who are interested solely in putting down their feelings about shapes and colours, and not in facts, drama, and human emotions generally'.[34] Clark however appeared to harbour a more deep-seated suspicion of abstract art. In 1939, he confessed that he felt that abstract art was out of kilter with historical circumstances: 'We have seen a series of events so tragic and horrible that our indignation can hardly fail to overflow and swamp out detached contemplation of shapes and colours. To be a pure painter seems almost immoral.'[35] In a radio discussion in late 1941, Clark dismissed the formalist credo with 'a kind of incredulous respect – what one feels for someone else's religion.'[36] To him, these sorts of art were in some way other, alien – European. Clark celebrated the fact that the collection amassed so far by the WAAC

> gives the impression that English painting is becoming a great deal more English. This does not mean that it is returning to the dreary provincialism of the late nineteenth century, but that the influence of international 'French' painting, for twenty years a necessary tonic, is now declining, and the national virtues are free to reassert themselves.[37]

The struggle to define a practice that was both modern and British was a key issue for interwar artists. During the First World War, artists such as Paul Nash had flirted with modernism to attempt to convey the horrors they witnessed on the Western Front, but this powerful adoption of modernism during the war made its use in peacetime difficult, as David Peter Corbett has argued:

> The pressure to define a practice which could be truly modern, truly representative of the conditions of lived experience in the contemporary world, was strong for all, simply because experience itself was pushing powerfully in that direction. But the languages and idioms available for that project, simply what could be said and

> done in painting were blocked and disabled by the impact of the First World War on a culture already far from disposed to confront its own modernity.[38]

As well as its association with war, modernism was seen as European, as Paul Nash articulated in 1930:

> We are invaded by very strong foreign influences; we possess certain solid traditions. Once more we find ourselves becoming conscious of a renaissance abroad, curious and rather embarrassed by the event; at once anxious to participate and afraid to commit ourselves, wishing to be modern, but uncertain whether that can be consistent with being British.[39]

Nash saw no contradiction between 'going modern and being British' and he urged that artists make 'an intelligent, unprejudiced study of modern movements and methods combined with an ideal to form standards for ourselves and to evolve a national style'.[40] To advance this objective, in 1933 he formed Unit 1, a loose collective of British modern artists that included sculptors Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth; painters Ben Nicholson, John Armstrong, Edward Burra and Edward Wadsworth; and architects Wells Coates and Colin Lucas. Unit 1, Nash proclaimed, stood for 'the expression of a truly contemporary spirit, for that thing which is recognised as peculiarly of *to-day* in painting, sculpture, and architecture'.[41] The artists, however, would not simply mimic European modernist styles. Rather, the influence of abstraction and surrealism was understood to give 'English artists the essential opportunities for expanding the strength of a national art'.[42] Unit 1 therefore stood for the creation of art that was both modern and British. For Nash, this was not only desirable, but inescapable: 'However strongly a work of art may appear stamped by personal genius, it owes something to the power of time and place.' Nash argued that there was 'a distinctive element, traceable through the whole history of our expression'. He searched to define this element and concluded that a certain spirit was 'the source, the motive power that animates this art. … If I were asked to describe this spirit I would say it is of the land; *genus loci* is indeed almost its conception. If its expression could be designated I would say it is entirely lyrical.' The exemplars of this spirit, he asserted, were Blake and Turner.[43] In this way he defined an authentically English style within the romantic tradition.

During the late 1930s we can detect an emergent movement of British artists who drew influence from the tradition of romanticism.[44] Through incorporating the formal advances of European modernism within an indigenous frame of reference, often the English landscape, these practitioners developed a native idiom of the modern. The most senior member of this loose movement was Paul Nash, who through his surreal depictions of the English landscape had, according to Myfanwy Piper, shown himself to be 'the contemporary heir of Cotman, Cox and Turner'.[45] Several slightly younger artists were also experimenting in this direction. John Piper, who was known in the mid-1930s for his abstract work, was by the end of the decade applying the lessons he had learnt about form and composition to his depiction of decaying buildings in the English landscape. Graham Sutherland built a reputation with his stylized depiction of

natural forms within the Welsh landscape while Henry Moore explored these ideas in sculptural form.[46]

Clark was a patron to many of the young artists experimenting in this field. He owned a large number of their works and provided valuable financial and practical support, such as providing Sutherland and Piper lodgings in his house during the war.[47] Clark extended this patronage through the activities of the WAAC. Nash, Piper and Sutherland were all among the thirty-seven artists who were given a coveted full-time commission. Moore meanwhile submitted twenty-seven images in fulfilment of a short-term contract. Clark actively promoted their work through the committee. Writing in *Studio* in 1942, Clark offered an entirely romantic definition of the national virtues of British art:

> First among these we may notice the vein of poetry … which is after all the natural expression of a pre-eminently poetical people. It takes the form of looking at nature in a mood of heightened imagination, so that men and things, landscapes and architecture acquire a certain strangeness and an almost dreamlike intensity.[48]

He cited Stanley Spencer, Paul Nash, Sutherland, Piper, Eric Ravilious and Edward Bawden as the best examples of artists working in this vein. These artists were heavily displayed by the committee. If we consider the 1945 exhibition at Burlington House, which showed roughly 20 per cent of the WAAC collection, we can see the dominance of these artists. While over 400 artists contributed to the collection, 71 of the 1028 paintings on display were by Nash, Moore, Sutherland and Piper. If we add Bawden, Thomas Hennell, Ravilious and Evelyn Dunbar to the list, the figure rises to 188. Many of the other works by lesser known artists shown could also be placed within the romantic genre. Although the committee purported to represent a cross section of British art, it was dominated by romantic artists.

Romantic art embodied some of the key themes of the propaganda war. It was understood as a distinctly British form of artistic expression. Modern romantic artists were described as the heirs to some of the most celebrated artists in the national canon, such as Blake, Constable and Turner. Britain's cultural heritage was mobilized in propaganda to articulate the values that the nation was defending.[49] For instance, when Humphrey Jennings directed the MOI film *Words for Battle* (1941), designed to communicate both at home and abroad what Britain was fighting for, the words he chose were not contemporary. Only at the very end of the film do we hear Churchill's call to fight them on the beaches. For most of the film, the case for war is made through the words of John Milton, William Blake, Robert Browning and Rudyard Kipling.

The rural landscape, the subject matter of much romantic art, was also a favourite theme for propagandists. There was a powerful association between the rural landscape and ideas of the nation.[50] Evident in elite society in the late nineteenth century, this association gained popular currency during the First World War and reached its zenith in the interwar period. In 1924 Baldwin pronounced that 'to me, England is the country, and the country is England'.[51] By 1939, the rural landscape was already established as a symbol of the nation and could be easily mobilized by wartime propagandists. On 13 July 1940, *Picture Post* published a special entitled 'What We Are Fighting For'.

The magazine pronounced that this 'is a war, firstly, for the land we live in … a war for everything we can see from our own window'. The accompanying photographs depicted the nation almost exclusively as a rural society.[52] Cinema also drew upon this imagery. From *Britain at Bay* (1940) to *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), British wartime films suggested that the values that Britain was fighting for were embodied by the rural landscape.[53] Landscape, like Britain's cultural heritage, was a vehicle through which the abstract values that Britain was defending could be represented. Romantic art, with its obsession with landscape and conscious acknowledgement of the nation's cultural heritage, complemented the broader programme of propaganda well. It also particularly suited to the furtherance of Clark's aims.

Kenneth Clark and the people's culture

In his autobiography Clark confessed that he did not expect that the WAAC would amass 'a record of war that could not be better achieved by photography'.[54] Rather, in establishing the committee, Clark hoped to use the opportunity war presented to renegotiate the relationship between the arts, the state and the viewing public. In this way, he hoped, the future of British art might be secured.[55] Clark believed that the British art scene faced a grave crisis because of the decline in patronage. Not only had this sponsorship provided the means of living for many artists in the past; it had also acted, he thought, to prevent the artist becoming self-indulgent. Clark argued that without patronage, the artist painting for himself 'became more interested in specialised problems of design and composition and realising his own inner vision and did not have to carry a section of opinion along with him'.[56] While some good art had been produced, he felt that artists 'would be better still if they felt themselves able to speak a language which the ordinary man, with a little experience and attention, could understand: because art … is stronger and fuller if it rests on a broad basis of popular approval'.[57] Clark hoped that the WAAC would act to bridge this divide between art and everyday life. Artists charged with producing an artistic record of war on behalf of the state would be galvanized to create work that had an immediate pertinence to ordinary people.

The public, however, needed to be educated to appreciate art. Clark felt that popular taste was poor. He attributed this to the fact that the ordinary person rarely encountered good art, and when they did, they lacked the understanding to appreciate it. Reviewing the British Institute of Adult Education's 1939 'Art for the People' exhibitions, he noted that lacking any other tools of judgement, visitors appraised the art by its realistic qualities. Such criteria excluded both the work of many of the great masters and much of the best contemporary artistic practice.[58] Clark believed that 'public taste can be educated' to appreciate a greater variety of art and that it was in this 'that the state can help the artist'.[59] To Clark, the WAAC was therefore an experiment by which he hoped to demonstrate the benefits of the state's involvement in the arts. Through the sponsorship of a wide programme of exhibitions and publications, the WAAC aimed to educate and elevate public taste to stimulate a wider interest and appreciation of modern art. This programme of cultural enrichment would, Clark hoped, democratize

access and participation in the fine arts and contribute to the creation of a 'people's culture' based on artistic excellence.[60] In this respect the WAAC must be placed in a mid-twentieth-century movement that encompassed organizations such as the BBC, the BIAE, the Army Bureau of Current Affairs, the CEMA, and, in the post-war period, the Arts Council.[61]

Throughout his life Clark was deeply committed to popularizing fine art. From the books he published in the interwar period, such as *One Hundred Details from Pictures in the National Gallery* (1938), to the landmark 1969 BBC series *Civilisation,* Clark attempted to make art both explicable and appealing to a popular audience. During the war he pursued this project in a number of ways: he edited the 1943 series *The Penguin Modern Painters*, which were inexpensive and written in an accessible style; he gave talks about art on the BBC; he was a founding member of the CEMA; he launched the popular lunchtime concerts at the National Gallery; and he furthered this agenda through the WAAC.

Although it was not part of the original remit of the committee, this agenda was openly acknowledged. The WAAC's 1942 annual report stated that it hoped that its activities might prove to be 'a very useful stimulus to the art of painting in this country and to public appreciation. This stimulus will, we hope, have a far reaching influence on cultural activities in days to come, after the war is over.'[62] The primary means by which the committee sought to stimulate public appreciation of art was through their programme of exhibitions. There was a continual but changing exhibition of war art at the National Gallery. Workers were encouraged to pop in during their lunch break, and maybe catch a concert while there, as suggested in the film *Listen to Britain* (1942). The exhibition proved remarkably successful and prompted the decision in 1941 to open the gallery on Sunday afternoons. The collection was also shown outside of London. This was seen as particularly important. In 1939, Roger Mortimer identified that the concentration of the art scene in London was problematic:

> At present pictures by living British artists are rarely seen outside London. I should like to see an exhibition of contemporary work in every provincial museum – the pictures to be purchased by the State, to be lent in turn to various cities, and to be on sale to any purchasers. The chief purpose of such a scheme would be to create a whole new public for pictures.[63]

The WAAC toured five exhibitions around provincial galleries in association with the Museums Association and three exhibitions of smaller pictures were sent to towns, villages, schools and army camps by the BIAE as part of its 'Art for the People' programme. These again were remarkably popular: for example, in 1943, 12,000 people visited the BIAE's 14-day exhibition at Braintree while 10,584 saw the Museum Association's 19-day show in Bath.[64] In addition to this, individual works were loaned out to a variety of venues, such as service bases, factories and British Restaurants. This took the WAAC's art out of museums and into the everyday spaces of wartime life and to a public whose previous encounters with art might have been limited. The major publishing endeavour by the WAAC was also not directed towards a traditional audience. The two series of small books of black and white reproductions entitled *War*

Pictures by British Artists were priced at just 1*s* 3*d*. These again proved surprisingly popular: 24,000 copies of the first series were printed and they sold out in just 6 months.[65]

For Clark, romantic art was an ideal form through which public taste could be educated. From his patterns of patronage, it is clear that Clark regarded romantic art as representing some of the best art currently being produced. Moreover, as he had noted, the public preferred art that was realistic. While Clark thought that they could be educated to appreciate more imaginative forms of art, totally abstract art, he believed, was a step too far.[66] Romantic art remained grounded in representation, however imaginatively it may be treated. It was therefore an ideal form of art to further Clark's agenda as it occupied a middle-ground between sentimental popular art and more inaccessible forms of modern art.

Clark's ambition to create a 'people's culture' of artistic excellence echoed the ideals embodied by what was to become one of the dominant themes in wartime culture: the construction of a people's peace. Although individuals within the MOI were keen to talk about reconstruction, they were forbidden to do so on the orders of Churchill. Nevertheless, the issue soon gained a momentum of its own. From J. B. Preistley's BBC *Postscripts* to *Picture Post's* 1941 special issue 'A Plan for Britain', which appears to have been initiated by Kenneth Clark, discussions about the construction of a fairer Britain saturated the popular media.[67] The publication of the Beveridge report in 1942 fuelled the debate and although the MOI ban was not rescinded, as the war progressed, the construction of a more egalitarian and democratic future emerged as one of the key themes in wartime propaganda. Clark's aspiration to create a democratic people's culture resonated with these dreams for a better future.

Conclusions

Despite its tense relationship with the MOI, there was great accord between the aims of the WAAC and the wider programme of propaganda. The development of cultural propaganda meant that art was recognized as a vehicle through which a positive image of the nation could be conveyed. It was particularly important within the contours of the Second World War, given both the popular suspicion of propaganda and the suppression of artistic freedom in Germany. In this context, the very existence of a committee in which free artistic expression appeared not to be subsumed beneath the dictates of propaganda was in itself good propaganda. The creation of an artistic record of war for posterity can also be understood to play a useful propagandist function. It conveyed to the people the historical significance of the activities they were involved in. This was a recurrent theme in propagandist films. *The Lion Has Wings* (1939), for example, juxtaposed the present day with scenes of the Armada, suggesting that contemporary events would assume an equally pivotal place in the nation's history.

The romantic forms of art favoured by the committee complemented the wider propaganda agenda, due to its conscious acknowledgement of the nation's cultural heritage and its fondness for landscape. Romantic art was also an ideal style through which Clark's aim to educate popular taste could be realized. Moreover, it was

particularly suited to the WAAC's understanding of artistic record: that good war art should document both what the war looked like and what it felt like. Stuart Sillars has argued that the different expressions of romanticism in this period were 'held together by a single key relationship, that of the external world and the inner, organising and refining sense of the artist'.[68] In common with earlier forms of romanticism:

> Outward land forms are taken in by the artist and mixed with his or her ideas, feelings and responses to them and the world of which they are a part. The resultant images and shapes are then figured forth in the paintings; they have become both a representation of the original forms and a re-presentation of them, symbolising in an untranslatable fashion the emotions, desires and anxieties of the artist within his or her experience of them. This is less than literal reality since it is no photograph; it is more than literal reality since it attempts to recreate the whole experience of the moment.[69]

Encompassing both the external forms and the experiential dimensions of war, the WAAC's interpretation of artistic record was essentially romantic.

2

The battle for production

The Second World War was fundamentally a war of machines, technology and industrial production. It was a war in which the entire resources of the most advanced industrial nations were pitted against each other in a battle to produce the highly technological weapons that characterized the conflict. The battle for production preceded the outbreak of hostilities. Rearmament commenced in 1934 and accelerated during the second half of the 1930s and into the war. From a relatively small and marginal industry in the interwar period, by December 1943 aircraft production was the largest sector of the war economy employing 1,678,200 men and women.[1] This chapter charts this dramatic expansion through its cultural representation. It highlights that industrial propaganda went through three distinct phases. In the first years of war, propagandists sought to reassure the public that the aircraft industry was highly efficient and capable of producing aeroplanes in the quantities required to win the air war. In the winter of 1941, the emphasis of propaganda shifted towards the recruitment of more workers, particularly women. By 1942, the value of propaganda within the factory was stressed and it sought to improve the morale and productivity of the existing workforce. This chapter maps the WAAC's representation of the aircraft industry onto this shifting propaganda agenda and demonstrates the ways in which the committee became directly involved in the state's programme of industrial propaganda.

Britain can make it!

The most prolific painter of the wartime aircraft industry was architect Raymond McGrath. In January 1940, he approached the committee with the suggestion of producing a popular illustrated account of aircraft production. He came with the highest recommendation from John Piper, to whom Clark was a patron. In a letter of introduction, Piper praised McGrath as 'one of the few people in this country who can do a drawing of a building that is at once accurate and beautiful'.[2] McGrath was one of the foremost modernist architects practising in Britain during the 1930s. In 1929, aged just twenty-six, he was appointed Decoration Consultant to the BBC and played an instrumental role in designing the interiors of the new Portland Place building. Other notable projects he was involved in included the interior of fashionable Fischer's Restaurant in New Bond Street and the unashamedly modern house, St Ann's Hill, which he built for Christopher Tunnard in 1936.[3]

During the interwar years, there was a close link between aviation and modernist architecture. In 1935, Le Corbusier published *Aircraft: The New Vision*, a homage to the technological wonder of the age. He pronounced:

> The airplane is the symbol of the new age. At the apex of the immense pyramid of mechanical progress it opens up the NEW AGE, it wings its way into it. The mechanical improvements of the fierce preparatory epoch – a hundred years' blind groping to discovery – have overthrown the basis of a civilisation thousands of years old.[4]

The new perspective granted by the aeroplane was, for Le Corbusier, an indictment of the city. From the air, the appalling design of the modern city was revealed in all its chaotic horror:

> The airplane instils, above all, a new conscience, the modern conscience. Cities, with their misery, must be torn down. They must be largely destroyed and fresh cities built.[5]

Not only did the aeroplane validate the modernist gospel of town planning, but it also offered the key to understanding the principle around which the cities of the future should be designed, pure functionalism:

> The airplane is nothing except a supporting plane – a means of propulsion.
>
> CLEARNESS OF FUNCTION!
>
> The airplane flies direct from one point to another indifferent to the contours of the earth.[6]

The book was crammed full of photographs that lingered on the aesthetics of aircraft design. By focusing in on small sections of the aircraft, from unfamiliar perspectives, the simple geometric elegance of the plane's form that derived from its functionality was revealed: 'Three tie-frames placed across the carling of the airplane to fix the struts of the engine. Poet, ponder a moment on the truth of these objects!'[7] The degree to which Le Corbusier's enthusiasm for aviation was shared by other modern architects is evinced by the frequent inclusion of aeroplane motifs on buildings constructed in this period. McGrath himself was fascinated with aeroplanes and his friendship with Lord Sempill, the influential aviator and president of the Royal Aeronautical Society, enabled him to secure several aviation contracts. McGrath designed the interior of the National Flying Services in 1931, which featured a counter shaped like aircraft wings. He also designed the adjustable chairs and tables for the Imperial Airway's Atlanta, the first monoplane airliner.[8] So enamoured was McGrath with aviation that when he was asked to design a range of wallpapers for Sanderson's, he adorned the roll with a repeating aeroplane motif, as featured on the cover of this book.[9] McGrath was also interested in industrial architecture. The final project he worked on before the war was an elaborate design for the Aspro factory in Slough. Given these interests, it is

understandable that McGrath approached the WAAC with a request to paint aircraft production. Over the course of 1940, he produced a set of sixteen paintings for the WAAC. While these images reflected his interests in architectural structures and the aesthetic of the aeroplane, they also complemented the broader propaganda themes of this period.

One of the key propaganda objectives of the first years of war was to showcase the formidable might of the aircraft industry. In June 1940, at the behest of Kenneth Clark, the MOI Policy Committee decided that the first priority of home publicity was to convince the public that Britain was more than capable of winning the war. In order to do this, they sought to demonstrate the strength of British industry, the volume of weaponry being produced and the size of Britain's air force.[10] Throughout the period of rearmament, both politicians and the public had imagined that the impending war would be determined in the air. In July 1934, Chancellor Neville Chamberlain announced the commencement of rearmament. In the wake of reports that suggested that Germany was beginning to build an air force and believing that after of the horrors of trench warfare, public opinion would be more tolerant of air rearmament than any other form of arms spending, Chamberlain cut projected naval and army spending and instead increased the size of the air force.[11] As the 1930s progressed, successive rearmament programmes demanded ever-increasing numbers of planes. This required a considerable expansion of the aircraft industry.[12] In 1935, it employed just 35,000; by September 1939 this had increased to 355,000.[13]

Despite this expansion, by the late 1930s production was falling well behind target. Of the 8,000 aircraft scheduled by 1939, in the spring of 1938 just 4,500 had been delivered. Moreover, 3,000 of these were already technologically obsolete; virtually none of the most advanced types had been delivered.[14] While 165 Spitfires were scheduled for delivery in the 12 months after production started in September 1937, by September 1938, the RAF had received just 5.[15] The Air Ministry faced a barrage of criticism in parliament and the popular press, which climaxed in May 1938, when Labour MP Arthur Greenwood called for a formal enquiry into rearmament and the state of Britain's air defences.[16] While this motion was defeated in Parliament, it caused the resignations of Lord Swinton, the Secretary of State for Air, and Lord Weir, the Industrial Advisor to the Air Ministry.[17] Accusations of Air Ministry blunders and incompetence were widely reported in the popular press.[18] The day after the Commons debate, *The Daily Mirror* accused the Air Ministry of exhibiting 'symptoms of muddle'. Evidence that Germany was radically out-producing Britain was 'ludicrous – or grim. … Germany is on a war-time scale of production; we, on a peace-time scale of preparation'.[19] A similar tone was adopted by the *Mirror's* columnist Cassandra five months later. Alarming statistics compared British production to the output of German factories. It was shameful, Cassandra alleged, that 'the richest nation in the world, backed by the greatest industrial system in Europe, have had to go shopping in America to get our "planes" … when someone gets around to reckoning up the price we've got to pay for the broken wings of British Military Air Strength, there'll be some ugly calculations'.[20]

After 1938, production increased rapidly. This had little to do with the reorientation of policy or the managerial changes at the Air Ministry. Rather, as Sebastian Ritchie has

argued, the major factor retarding production in the mid-1930s was the rapid rate of technological advancement. Until a degree of stability had been reached, and the new designs proven and tested, quantity production could not begin.[21] This was achieved by 1938 and the new planes, such as the Spitfire, started to be produced in volume. Output increased rapidly, rising from 2,827 planes in 1938 to 7,940 in 1939. By 1940, Britain was producing more aircraft than any other county and crucially nearly 50 per cent more than Germany.[22] The first task of wartime propagandists was therefore to dispel the image of incompetence that had tarnished the industry during the 1930s and reassure the public that Britain had the industrial resources necessary to support a formidable air force.

Raymond McGrath's interests as a modernist architect predisposed him to produce images that would complement this agenda. During the 1930s, there was a strong association between modernist architecture and modern industry. Many of the new industries that sprung up in this period employed modernist architects to build their factories, and some, like the Hoover Building (now the Tesco Hoover Building) on London's Western Avenue, remain among the finest examples of art deco architecture. This was recognized contemporaneously. *The Times* argued that the new factories around London represented some of the best examples of modern British architecture. Such a style, the reporter asserted, embodied 'swiftness of movement', suggestive of the efficient production processes contained within. He was particularly struck by the factories' white facades, in contrast to their 'sullen' brick predecessors.[23] This contrast was made frequently during the decade. For instance, in *English Journey* (1934), Priestley mused that he had visited three Englands: nineteenth-century industrial England, rural England and the consumer-driven new England. Priestley summed up the contrast between new England and industrial England by 'the difference between a typical nineteenth-century factory, a huge dark brick box, and a modern factory, all glass and white tiles and chromium plate'.[24] Priestley was not alone in making such a journey during the 1930s. Artists, writers, photographers and film makers, such as George Orwell, Paul Rotha and Bill Brandt, travelled to the North to bring back images and harrowing descriptions of the suffering in those areas worst blighted by depression. In these representations, the Northern industrial landscape of brick-built Victorian factories symbolized larger fears about national decline.[25] In opposition, the modern architecture of newer factories emphasized the prosperity and productivity contained within the new industrial landscape of the South. The architectural style of McGrath's images drew upon this association to create an impression of an ultra-modern and highly productive industry.

In his paintings, McGrath's background as a modernist architect is immediately apparent. Stylistically, they are very similar to his architectural sketches in their pronounced use of line and his controlled but often bold colouration. McGrath was not concerned with the human element in the production process and his images give little sense of the experience of factory life. Rather, his primary interests were the factory space and the aircraft themselves. McGrath was fascinated by the different qualities of new materials, particularly glass and metals. In 1937 he published *Glass in Architecture and Decoration*, which celebrated the qualities of glass in modern design. In *Assembling the Wings of a Blenheim bomber* (Figure 2.1), McGrath drew

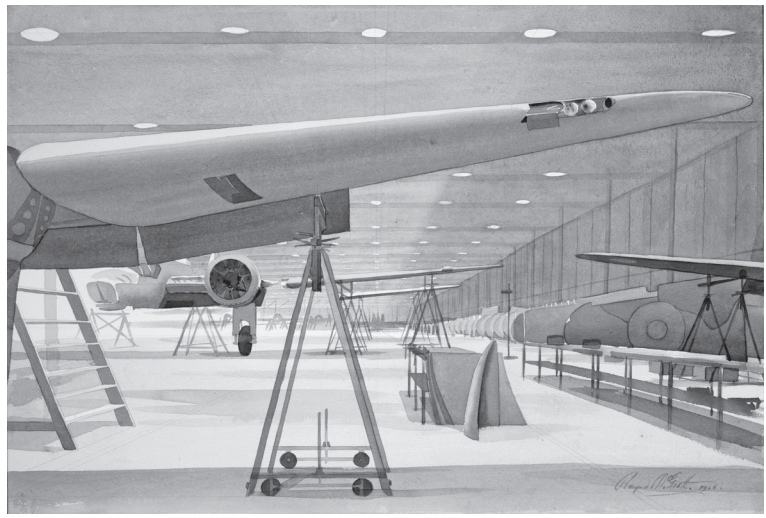

Figure 2.1 Raymond McGrath, *Assembling the Wings of a Blenheim Bomber*, 1940. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

attention to the metal construction of the aircraft and the industrial space, both tonally and through his exploration of the way the material behaved under light. This emphasized the technologically sophisticated nature of the industry. The exaggerated sense of perspective and strong lighting makes the factory appear infinite, suggesting the vastness of this space, and by implication, the scale of the national industrial effort. Stacked along the right-hand wall are row upon row of identical half-built planes, testifying to the volume of production in 1940. McGrath frequently depicted rows of components.[26] This both emphasized the scale of the productive effort and reflected sights that McGrath was likely to have encountered. To meet the demands of rearmament, the government had encouraged the practice of subcontracting. At the outbreak of war, firms were instructed to subcontract at least 50 per cent of airframe construction. New factories therefore acted as final assembly units, supplied with various airframe parts from firms across the region.[27] In these assembly factories, where McGrath appears to have been painting, stacks of sub-assemblies delivered from the constellation of factories involved in production would have been stored, awaiting construction. Very little actual manufacture took place at these sites as the proliferation of subcontracting engendered a spatial separation between production and assembly. McGrath appears to have only depicted scenes at the assembly factories and his images therefore do not give any indication of the other processes involved in aircraft manufacture. Scenes of aircraft assembly were likely to have been more visually appealing to McGrath because at this stage of the production process, the aesthetic of the aeroplane was fully formed (see Figure 2.2).

McGrath's images were exhibited widely by the WAAC in 1940. The public admired them for their accuracy and photographic realism.[28] While McGrath's images did reflect the realities of the industry he encountered, the way in which this is rendered

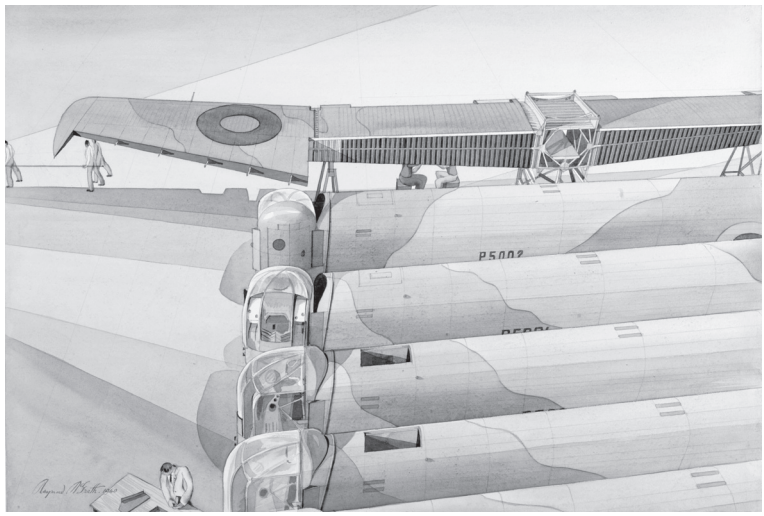

Figure 2.2 Raymond McGrath, *Rear Turrets of a Whitley Aircraft*, 1940. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

and the elements he focused upon are determined by his personal interests and the style he had developed in his practice as a modernist architect. These interests complemented the propaganda priorities of the time, especially if people interpreted them as realistic. McGrath's paintings conveyed an image of a highly sophisticated and productive industry capable of countering the long awaited German air offensive. His images recorded the rapid modernization of the aircraft industry that had occurred during rearmament, and through the associations created by the modern architectural style he deployed, the technological sophistication of the aircraft in production and the efficiency and productivity of the industrial space itself were emphasized.

Women of Britain come into the factories

During the first tense year of war, as Britain awaited the long-anticipated air attack, propagandists sought to reassure the public that the nation had the industrial might necessary for the successful prosecution of war. In the summer of 1940, as German planes began to appear over British shores, new challenges emerged on the industrial front. During rearmament, increases in production were primarily achieved by expanding productive space through extensions to existing factories and the construction of new ones. After the outbreak of war, the question of labour supply became increasingly important. The first reports of shortages reached the government in the spring of 1940. If new supplies of workers could not be found, production could not be further increased. In August 1940, William Beveridge was asked to investigate the problem. His report stressed that intake into the armed forces must be regulated in accordance with the needs of industry, as it was likely that armament production would

be the limiting factor on the war effort. It identified that an additional 800,000 workers needed to be recruited by August 1941. Given the demand for men from the armed services, this could only be achieved by the widespread employment of women. It was estimated that around two million additional female workers were required.[29] Progress to this end had been slow so far. In the first sixteen months of war, the number of women employed in engineering and allied industries had increased by only 207,400.[30] Government action was therefore required to rectify this situation.

In January 1941, the government launched a recruitment drive for women, harnessing all forms of propaganda it had at its disposal: posters, films, travelling war work exhibitions and the WAAC. In late November 1940, just weeks after Beveridge submitted his report, W. D. Sturch, who represented the Ministry of Supply on the committee, asked if the WAAC might assist in recruitment efforts and urged the commission of more paintings of factories and factory workers.[31] In February 1941, he more forcefully pressed upon the WAAC the need for industrial images. He recommended that the work being done by women in factories be prioritized, as they were the principle targets of the current campaign.[32]

If we look at the images of industrial production acquired by the WAAC in 1941, the committee appear to have been receptive to his suggestion. Of the eight images of aircraft production commissioned or purchased by the committee that year, seven prominently featured women workers. Both images commissioned were by female artists, Ethel Gabain and Dorothy Coke.[33] The committee was aware that both in terms of artists and subjects, the collection had a masculine bias. In March 1940, Clark asked the committee to consider artists, women as well as men, who might be suitable to document women's wartime contributions. Evelyn Dunbar, Dorothy Coke and Ethel Gabain were selected to fulfil this brief and were directed to meet with Lady Reading, of the Women's Voluntary Service, to arrange suitable scenes. This did very little to alter the gender balance of the artists employed by the WAAC. Evelyn Dunbar was the only woman given a full-time commission, and of the 123 artists given a short-term contract, just 13 were women. Moreover, the contracts given to these artists usually confined them to the depiction of women at war.

In 1941, the committee also purchased five pastels by Rupert Shephard. Although he had trained at the Slade and held his first one-man exhibition at the Calmann Gallery in 1939, at the time these pictures were produced, Shephard worked as a jig and tool draughtsman at the Gramophone Co., Hayes, which produced aircraft components during the war. The pictures he submitted were all of workers he observed at the factory where he worked.[34] In contrast to McGrath's sleek but sterile depictions, Shephard revealed the factory to be a hive of human and mechanical activity. While the committee did not instigate the production of these pictures, the fact that they purchased these, while they rejected countless other submissions, demonstrates their interest at this time in acquiring images of the workforce and women in particular. This suggests that the WAAC responded to the request of the Ministry of Supply and became actively involved in the state's programme of industrial propaganda (see Figure 2.3).

The attempt to persuade women to come into the factories voluntarily was a failure. By August 1941, just 87,000 had taken up war work of some sort.[35] A measure of compulsion was deemed necessary. The National Service Act (No 2) was passed

Figure 2.3 Rupert Shepherd, *Aircraft Component Factory: Men and Women on Machines Seen from the Tool Room*, 1941. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

in December 1941. All unmarried women and childless widows between the ages of twenty and thirty were called up and given a choice between industry, Civil Defence and the Services. Between June 1941 and June 1942, an additional 654,000 women entered the industrial workforce.[36] To what extent did the WAAC manage to record these women's experiences of factory life?

When women made it into the factories, they were rarely employed on the same terms as their male colleagues and gendered hierarchies of pay and skill persisted. Under the terms negotiated by the Employers and the Amalgamate Engineering Union in May 1940, women who performed 'men's work' unaided should, after a probationary period, receive the same pay as the men they replaced.[37] However, in an industry with rapidly changing production methods, it was difficult to prove whether a certain job was customarily done by men or women. Employers also quibbled about how to define unaided. Consequently, few women received the full male rate.[38] Women were largely employed in lower skilled jobs; only a very small number did work graded as skilled.[39] Although propaganda, such as the film *Jane Brown Changes Her Job* (1941), stressed that women would receive extensive training, this was rarely the case. Between 1941 and 1942, nearly 10,000 women received sixteen weeks of extensive training in government training centres; however, the skills they learnt were rarely utilized by employers.[40] In 1942 the courses were curtailed to four to eight weeks. In its study of war factories, Mass Observation concluded that 'women are still being regarded and treated as inferiors and not being given full opportunity for the use of their skill'.[41]

The different status of women in industry found visual expression in several paintings acquired by the committee in 1942. Barnett Freedman painted a series of miniature portraits of the personnel at the Frazer-Nash factory.[42] He had previously painted the

crew of HMS Repulse in this way. By depicting the personnel at an aircraft factory in the same fashion, Freedman reinforced the significance of the industrial front to the war effort and the vital contributions made by these workers. He underlined the importance of women's contribution to industry by placing their portraits in the centre of the arrangement; however, while the majority of men are posed in individual portraits, most of the women are depicted in groups or pairs, pointing to a gendered difference in status.

Two very different visions of aircraft production were acquired from Leslie Cole in the first months of 1942. *Glider Construction, Fitting Undercarriages* depicted two 'technicians' Cole emphasized.[43] He was particularly taken with gliders as a subject because he was keen to depict craft on the 'secret list' and felt that 'gliders themselves are lovely to look at – extremely fish like'.[44] This comes through in the image. The aircraft hangar is painted in silvery watery hues, making it appear as some sort of aquarium; however, the metallic tones also create the impression of a state of the art factory space. Cole admired the 'technicians' as highly skilled workers. He noted that they had been specially chosen to work on this project and while developing the prototype, they work without blueprints.[45] The highly technological feel of the picture reinforced the technological sophistication of their work and the high levels of skill they possess. This image stands in stark contrast to Cole's depiction of female workers. The term 'girls' in the title of Figure 2.4 is a little misleading given that the three women depicted appear to be closer to middle-age than girlhood. The red overalls they wear accentuate their ample bosoms and bottoms. This more maternal image was perhaps an indication of the introduction of part-time workers into industry from March 1942, which allowed the employment of women whose domestic responsibilities precluded them from full-time work.[46] The feel of the two factory spaces could not be more different. While the technological sophistication of glider construction is communicated by a

Figure 2.4 Leslie Cole, *Aircraft Production: Girls Working on Wings*, 1942. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

metallic, clean and clear space, evocative of a laboratory, the women are painted in warm colours, in a haphazard and cluttered factory. The wings are propped up on makeshift wooden trestles, while the fabric they are stretching, drapes over the wings, reminiscent of sheets on an ironing board. The space appears almost domestic; the factory represented as an extension of the home.

Cole's depiction of the factory space correlated with wider representations of women and work. The recruitment poster 'Victory Is in Your Hands' drew parallels between factory work and domestic chores such as sewing and peeling potatoes.[47] This domestication of the factory sought to lessen the challenge posed by war work to ideas of home and gender. Just as an emphasis on the beauty and glamour of wartime women reassured Britain that women were not being transformed by their wartime roles and losing their femininity, representing war work in this way suggested that it was not a radical departure from the work already performed by women in society.[48] Not only did the WAAC respond to the government's request to paint women's work, the way in which they depicted women in industry echoed broader propagandist tropes.

War art and industrial morale

The accord between WAAC images and more obvious forms of propaganda is particularly explicit in a series of images commissioned from John Ensor in 1942. Ensor's series of twenty-one paintings depicted the record-breaking construction of a Wellington bomber over a weekend.[49] This same feat was the subject of the MOI's film *Workers' Weekend* (1943). Just as in the film, Ensor takes us through this remarkable feat of modern production, from the construction of the iconic geodetic frame to the finished plane taking off. The final image in Ensor's series is virtually identical to the final shot of production in *Worker's Weekend*. It showed the plane waiting at the factory doors, engines whirring, ready for its first flight. The title of the painting of reinforced the speed of production: *From the Jig to the Engine-run in Twenty-Eight Hours: Aircraft BK. 557*. On top of the plane flies a union jack, which hinted at the national effort that has enabled such rapid production to be achieved. The series is a homage to the achievements of modern methods of mass production. The emphasis throughout is on the volume and speed of production. In this regard Ensor's series evokes similar ideas to McGrath's paintings; however, an important shift had occurred in the broader propaganda context. While in 1940 propagandists sought to reassure the public that the aircraft industry was up to scratch, as the war progressed, propaganda was increasingly deployed within factories and aimed to sustain the morale of the existing workforce.

Before the end of 1941, the focus of industrial strategy was on recruitment. Increased production of aircraft was to be achieved by enlarging the size of the workforce. Labour supply was however ultimately finite and in 1942 a general shortage emerged. The aircraft industry was particularly affected by this as the ambitious bomber programme demanded by Churchill in September 1941 required an additional 850,000 workers.[50] However, the Ministry of Aircraft Production (MAP) struggled to recruit unskilled employees as much of the available labour had already been engaged in other war industries or in the services. While it was able to recruit around 20,000 to 30,000 workers

for the first 10 months of 1942, this figure fell to 13,000 in November and just 5,000 in December. The crisis was particularly acute in areas such as the Midlands where aircraft production was concentrated.[51] Unable to find additional recruits, increased production would have to be met by improving the efficiency of the existing workforce.

There was however a growing concern about the state of morale inside Britain's factories, manifested by the incidence of time wasting and dawdling in the factory; the frequency of absenteeism and lateness; and the number of industrial disputes and strikes.[52] Certain practical measures were deployed to tackle these symptoms. Welfare and personnel managers were appointed to factories to monitor and combat absenteeism.[53] Joint Production Committees were established to bring management and the workforce into dialogue, to prevent the escalation of disputes and engender a sense of wider participation in the organization of production. There were also attempts to relieve the boredom and monotony that defined much of the highly repetitive work in factories, such as 'Music While You Work', lunchtime concerts, canteens and the provision of sport and leisure facilities on site. For the MOI, 'production can only be increased by getting more work per head and this largely depends on what is going on inside the head'.[54] A new programme of industrial propaganda was therefore deemed necessary.

Propaganda was widely deployed in the aircraft industry in 1940 when Lord Beaverbrook, the proprietor of the *Daily Express*, was Minister of Aircraft Production. He flooded the factories with posters exhorting workers to strive harder. While this had some effect in the emergency, the limitations of such a strategy were soon realized.[55] As one personnel manager from a Birmingham factory complained:

> The methods of the propaganda departments of the government are not looked upon particularly favourably by workers. They are tired to death of being lectured, exhorted, warned, flattered etc. The age old suspicion of those on top is still there. When I or any of my staff put up posters in the works the only comment we hear is 'more waste of paper – thought we needed it for munitions'. They will listen to a speaker who will tell them something, but if they suspect they are going to be exhorted, it's all up. The posters sent out to factories are often poor stuff. It seems as if someone thinks 'this will be a good idea' and showers posters with the good idea all over the country. … The whole thing is wasteful and indiscriminate.[56]

As the war progressed more subtle approaches to propaganda were developed. Rather than simple exhortations, these sought to reinforce the important contribution each worker made to the war effort and how the small and abstract parts they produced were used in recognizable weapons of war. In the summer of 1941, a branch for industrial propaganda was established within the MAP. Its activities were diverse, ranging from film showings and exhibitions to worker visits to RAF bases and ministerial visits to factories. In its first year of existence it arranged over 1,000 visits to factories by pilots and issued over 200,000 bulletins and posters to factories.[57]

War art was deployed in this new programme of propaganda. Ensor's series was prominently displayed in the factory in which it was painted. Mr Duncan of Vickers was so impressed by the paintings that he 'not only borrowed them to show his special visitors, but also insisted that all his workers should see them displayed'.[58] How this was received is

unknown. The workers certainly had ambiguous feelings towards the artist in their midst. Ensor sensed some resentment from the workers at the factory, who felt that as an artist he did not work as such. In a letter to the WAAC he quoted a typical overheard remark: "Well, if *I* could do that I know *I* would not work!"[59] However, the director of John Summers and Sons Ltd., a nearby steel factory, believed the paintings had a beneficial effect on the workforce. He requested that Ensor might paint a similar series in his own factory:

> For the past six months, in conjunction with your good selves [the MOI] and the Ministry of Supply, we have been running an exhibition showroom near our main entrance in which fortnightly exhibitions of finished products made from our Steel have been displayed. These displays … have undoubtedly stimulated the interest of the workpeople and raised production.
>
> In furtherance of this scheme of propaganda we are now setting up an Information Room whereby we can educate our work people and endeavour to allay some of the suspicion which exists between the masters and men. … It would be a tremendous incentive to this endeavour if some paintings such as I have seen could be exhibited in this room during opening week.[60]

This demonstrates a changing understanding of industrial propaganda. While earlier images of industry were aimed at the public and were propagandist in the sense that they either reassured by demonstrating the might of British aircraft production, or that they played a part in the recruitment campaign, as the war progressed, the audience shifted to the industrial workforce itself. The very presence of the artist on the factory floor and the display of paintings in the workplace, it was believed, would signify the importance of their work to the war effort and boost morale and productivity.

In January 1943, the WAAC were urged to participate more fully in this campaign of industrial propaganda. The Ministry of Production's representative asked the WAAC to commission more factory scenes in order that the committee might contribute towards a broader campaign to combat the growing unrest and strikes in factories. It was felt that the presence of an artist painting in the factory would suggest official recognition of the workers' contribution to the war and therefore boost morale.[61] This brought about a reorientation in the nature of war art. Whereas previously it was the painting itself that was understood as an object of propaganda, now the very act of the artist painting within the factory was believed to perform a propagandist function. This meant that the actual subject of the image was of less importance and over the course of 1943 a greater diversity of paintings was collected. While Morris Kestelman documented repair work in *Blade Heat-treatment Cage*, Percy Horton recorded the contribution of disabled workers in *Blind Workers in a Birmingham Factory*.[62] Elsie Hewland's *Assembling Hawker Hurricanes* (Figure 2.5) continued the focus on women's contribution to the war effort. The factory space is a hive of activity, with each worker busily engaged in their task. The repetition of pattern, shapes and colour gives emphasis to the volume of production, while the inclusion of the two sailors on the left of the painting recorded another aspect of this industrial propaganda campaign.

The diversity of images collected by the WAAC in 1943 can be seen in the spectrum of works produced by a single artist. In 1943, John Armstrong recorded both the

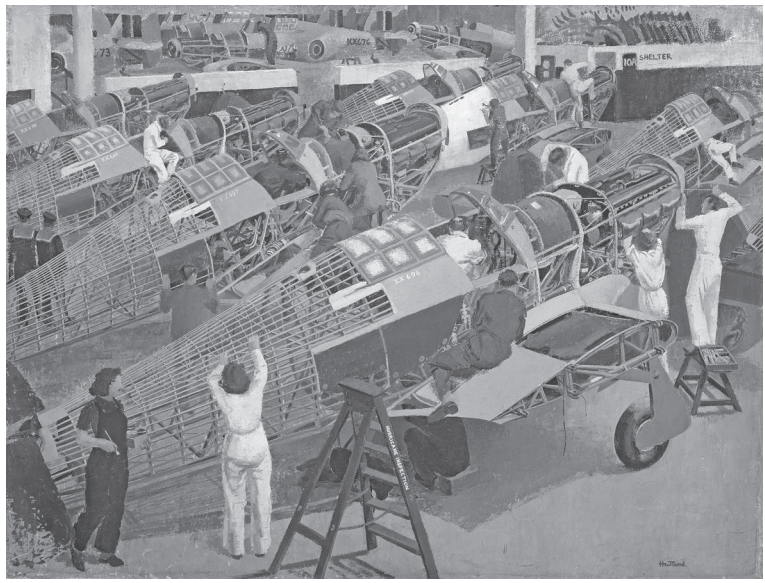

Figure 2.5 Elsie Hewland, *Assembling Hawker Hurricanes,* 1943. Courtesy of the Manchester Art Gallery.

construction of Mosquitoes and Wellingtons. Armstrong rendered *Building Planes* (Figure 2.6) in poster-like blocks of colour. Combined with the highly geometric composition, this image is one of the most modernistic representations of the aircraft industry in the collection. Armstrong's workers, depicted like the rest of the painting in flat blocks of colour, are featureless and anonymous. On the upper floor, where the same colour is applied to workers and machines, the workers appear a mere extension of the machine. The planes themselves are penned in by the jig – a hint perhaps of the aggressive power of these bombers. The floating discs of light add to the futuristic feel of the painting, highlighting the metallic geodetic construction of the Wellington. The image conveys a sense of a modern, mechanized productive space. Armstrong's depiction of *Mosquito Production* stands in sharp contrast.[63] Rather than flat planes of colour, he has built the image up through a series of short brush strokes, rendering it reminiscent of a patchwork quilt or cobbled floor. In contrast to the highly mechanized image of Wellington production, this technique emphasized the quality of craftsmanship, both in the painting of the picture and in the production of these planes. While *Building Planes* emphasized the metallic elements of factory and plane, the tonal range and texture of *Mosquito Production* highlighted the plane's wooden construction. Even the factory roof appears to be timber. The contrast between the two images is further underlined by the different forms seen. While the image of Wellington production is composed of geometric shapes, the central element of *Mosquito Production* is far more organic, reminiscent of an insect's anatomy. In these two images Armstrong presented two contrasting representations of modern industry. This diversity reflected the material reality of aircraft construction in the Second World War. The introduction of the

Figure 2.6 John Armstrong, *Building Planes*, 1943. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

wooden Mosquito, and its impressive performance, did much to reverse the association of metal with modern production. It also allowed aircraft construction to occur in a much wider range of locations. This real diversity of factory spaces was not, however, represented in the images of aircraft production amassed by the WAAC.

The WAAC and the experience of aircraft production

Table 2.1 gives some indication of the variety of processes involved in aircraft production. The WAAC's collection focused almost wholly on scenes that featured the recognizable aesthetic of the aeroplane. This meant that only those working in aircraft factories and perhaps airframe subcontractors were employed on processes that were represented in war art. Although the WAAC aspired to provide a visual record of the war, in regard to aircraft production, it only recorded the experience of just over a third of the workers involved in the industry. The contributions of those individuals working at various subcontractors, component factories and crucially engine production were ignored. This limited vision was not because of the WAAC's involvement in the broader programme of industrial propaganda; rather, it emerged from the way that the committee understood war art.

War art, the committee insisted, should be instantly recognizable as a picture of war. In 1943, art critic Hubert Wellington was sent on a mission by the WAAC to find suitable industrial subjects. His main priority was to find factories which would lend themselves to the production of paintings that were unmistakeably 'war images'. Several component factories were rejected because there was nothing distinctly warlike about them. For example, Wellington dismissed radio assemblage as 'identical with peacetime production'.[64] In order to be readily identifiable as war art, nearly every image that the WAAC collected of aircraft production featured the recognizable

Table 2.1 Breakdown of Labour in the Aircraft Industry 1943

Aircraft factories	300,000
Airframe subcontractors	250,000
Engines and accessories	265,000
Undercarriages and propellers	90,000
Guns and turrets	50,000
Radio and radar	125,000
Other aircraft equipment and component subcontracting	280,000
Materials	140,000
Total	1,500,000

Source: Hornby, *Factories and Plant*, 251.

aesthetic of the aeroplane in construction. Because of the organization of production, the form of the aeroplane was only apparent in the final assembly factories.

For those involved in other parts of the production process, their work could seem far removed from the war. In February 1942, Celia Fremlin, a middle class Oxford graduate and Mass Observer, was posted to the Ecko shadow factory in Malmesbury, Wiltshire, which made components for RAF radios and radar. An account of her experiences was published in 1943 in the book *War Factory*. She described the work as 'simple and monotonous, involving simply placing the part in position … and then the raising or lowering of a handle'.[65] Processes such as these were the result of the way in which the aircraft industry had expanded. In order to allow the employment of semi-skilled and unskilled workers, production processes were diluted, broken down into their constituent parts. The labour force drafted into the industry could then be set to simple, repetitive machine work, producing small components that, although vital, seemed far removed from the war effort. This distancing was exaggerated by the policy of subcontracting which meant that the final product was not assembled in the factory or even the town in which the component was produced, but in the specialist large assembly factories that were documented by the WAAC.

Celia Fremlin recorded that most of the women in the machine shop did not understand what they were making. But she also believed that they did not have the 'faintest desire to understand'.[66] While management and government had attributed production problems to the remoteness of work to the war, the observer believed that the 'trouble there is not that the girls do not realise their work is important to the war, but the majority of them are so little *interested in the war that they do not care whether their work is important to it or not*'.[67] The war worker, she argued, was more removed from the war than the majority of the population:

> By the nature of her work and its long hours, she is cut off from the daily life of her community; she is sheltered from its day to day difficulties and problems (i.e. rationing, transport, etc.). The attitude which she inevitably develops to life as a whole colours even more markedly her attitude to the war. It is a well-known fact that the average working-class woman's interest in the war is kept alive … by the personal inconveniences: rationing, blackout, shortages and so on. And from these inconveniences someone who works in a war factory, with an adequate canteen, for

> twelve hours a day is automatically excluded. There is nothing to keep alive in her even the slightest degree of interest, which her mothers and sisters feel in the war.[68]

The war, she concluded, was viewed as something that had to be endured. Rather than being a hive of patriotic productivity, the factory she described was characterized by time wasting, idling and clockwatching, as the workers counted down the minutes until the next break, the end of the day and, ultimately, the moment when they will be released from factory work and return to their normal lives. Factory work was compared by the women to 'prison' or 'slavery' and they fantasized about the day when peace would herald a resumption of life itself.[69] Such sentiments seem far removed from the images of keen productivity collected by the WAAC.

There were some exceptions, most notably the series of pastels by Rupert Shepherd (see Figure 2.3). His pictures are unusual in the fact that they do not feature aircraft assembly, but record life at the component factory where he worked until 1943, when he suffered a nervous breakdown caused by the 'exacting conditions of industry'.[70] His images featured women performing their repetitive mechanical tasks. Often, he arranged machinery and factory architecture to make the workers appear physically hemmed in, conveying something of how trapped the women in the Malmesbury factory felt.[71]

The description of life in the war factory recorded by Celia Fremlin resonates with the work of the artist Margaret Abbess. Like Shephard, Abbess worked in an aircraft component factory, but her art was 'unofficial' and private, becoming public only in 2005 when it was presented to the Imperial War Museum. Her story of factory life was similar to the accounts recorded in *War Factory.* She had not gone voluntarily into industry but had been directed there when she came of age. If she had been given the choice she would rather have gone into one of the various services, but this option was not made available to her. Factory life, she recalled, 'was highly disciplined, akin to "army rule". One couldn't take a day off and the days were long and arduous.' The darkness of those years stuck in her mind: 'One rarely saw daylight as work started before sunrise and finished after sunset. The factory was entirely blacked out, lending a disorientating timelessness to work.' The work itself was dull and monotonous, and ranged from ladling iron filings over propeller hubs to check for cracks, to stamping numbers on components and, worst of all, measuring springs.[72]

Because her images were unofficial, they recorded aspects of factory life that could not find expression in the official art collection. While WAAC images foregrounded productivity, there is little indication in any of Abbess's images that anything was actually being made. In one sketch, workers stand round benches, but there is nothing in front of them.[73] Enforced idle time occurred in industry for a variety of reasons including shortages of raw materials, hold-ups in sub-assemblies or labour being employed before there was work for them, and were particularly frequent in the aircraft industry when new models were introduced.[74] Abbess's pictures focus on non-productive time, such as rest breaks, which Celia Fremlin noted, were eagerly anticipated.[75] Abbess described the tea break as the 'highlight of the day. A bell would ring and you were able to leave your workspace.'[76] As *Tea Time* (Figure 2.7) suggests, this was a gleeful and playful moment before work resumed again. *Outside the Factory* (Figure 2.8) recorded the exuberance of workers leaving the factory. While those inside

Figure 2.7 Margaret Abbess, *Tea Time*, n.d. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

Figure 2.8 Margaret Abbess, *Outside the Factory,* n.d. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

remain hemmed in by the enormous machines, those leaving appear almost to dance as they mark the end of another day at the factory. Scenes of this sort were totally absent from the WAAC collection, which instead concentrated on images that complemented the wider schema of industrial propaganda.

Conclusions

This chapter has charted the correlation between war art and the broader programme of propaganda. In the first years of war, propagandists strove to reassure the public of the might of Britain's industrial machine. Raymond McGrath's architectural paintings presented an image of a modern, technologically sophisticated and highly productive industry. From the winter of 1940, when the manpower crisis in industry was fully appreciated, the focus of propaganda shifted towards the recruitment of new workers, particularly women. During this period, the WAAC demonstrated a preference for more worker-centric images, especially those that featured women. The propaganda context shifted again towards the end of 1942 as supplies of new labour dwindled. Increases in production now had to be achieved through the increased efficiency of the existing workforce and propaganda strove to improve morale and productivity within the factories. The work of the WAAC was exhibited as part of this new propaganda campaign and the war artists were invited into the factories to signify the importance of the work being performed. The collecting patterns of the WAAC not only mirrored the broader propaganda framework but, on several occasions, appear to have responded to requests to participate in this campaign. The involvement of the WAAC in industrial propaganda impacted on their ambition to record the experience of factory life and aspects of war work such as boredom, claustrophobia and idle time went largely undocumented. Nevertheless, more significant omissions resulted from the committee's desire that its collection should be identifiable as *war* art. This meant that most images featured the iconic aesthetic of the aeroplane and failed to represent the experience of the majority who worked outside of the final assembly factories.

The extent to which the collecting practices of the WAAC were driven by the propaganda agenda becomes more evident if we look beyond 1943 – the peak moment of employment in aircraft production. In planning the manpower budget of 1944, overwhelming priority was given to the services in anticipation of the invasion of Europe. As there were no more supplies of manpower, 240,000 workers needed to be conscripted into the armed forces.[77] By December 1944, the numbers employed by the MAP had fallen by 128,400.[78] The WAAC followed these shifting priorities. The only images of aircraft production delivered in 1944 were two more images by Rupert Shepherd and two images of underground factories by Frank Dobson, both continuations of earlier commissions. Rather, most images acquired by the WAAC in 1944 and 1945 depicted the military. The following chapter examines how the WAAC represented the most iconic section of the armed forces: Fighter Command.

3

The Battle of Britain

As the Battle of Britain raged in the skies above Southern England, the deeds of the RAF were already being narrated in legendary terms, events turned into epics, pilots into heroes. J. B. Priestley proclaimed that 'our airmen have already found a shining place for ever in the world's imagination, becoming one of those bands of young heroes, creating a saga, that men can never forget'.[1] Glamorous, daring and precariously mortal, the fighter pilot was positioned as the archetype of British heroic masculinity.

This chapter explores how artists employed by the WAAC depicted the men of the RAF. The fate of the first Air Ministry artists, Keith Henderson and Paul Nash, highlights the tensions within the committee. Kenneth Clark and Harald Peake, the Air Ministry representative, had very different views on how the service should be represented. Clark favoured art that echoed the broader propagandist themes of the conflict, whereas Peake sought heroic portraiture that sat comfortably within the tradition of air force representation that was established during the First World War. While Clark was the controller of home publicity at the MOI, Peake oversaw the RAF's Directorate of Public Relations and was responsible for the broader representation of the air force. This dispute therefore had a wider pertinence and revealed key differences in how the Ministry and the RAF wanted to project the air war. Peake's views ultimately prevailed and with the appointment of Eric Kennington, he found an artist who could produce the kind of heroic portraits he desired. Through an exploration of Kennington's work, this chapter considers the ways in which the heroic character was constructed during the Second World War and the tensions this engendered with the wider projection of an egalitarian people's war.

The fate of the first Air Ministry artists

In April 1940, Paul Nash and Keith Henderson were appointed by the WAAC as the first full-time Air Ministry artists. Neither appointment lasted the year. Henderson was in many ways ideally qualified for the role. He was a veteran artist from the First World War and had largely concentrated on painting the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). Throughout the interwar years he maintained his interest in aviation and provided the illustrations for Cecil Lewis's pilot memoir *Sagittarius Rising* (1936). He was assigned to paint the RAF in April 1940, but found that William Rothenstein, whose work the committee felt was not of sufficient standard to warrant a contract, had beaten him to his subjects. In December 1939 Rothenstein had independently approached station

commanders and secured access to paint portraits of serving personnel. Arriving the following April, Henderson ended up concentrating on views and hangar scenes. While the Air Ministry were generally disappointed with these sorts of images, things came to a head after he submitted the painting *An Improvised Test of an Under-carriage*. Henderson was aware that this scene, which showed a mechanic jumping on the wing, was likely to anger Peake. In a letter to the committee's secretary, he wrote, 'Don't draw Blondie's attention to this. … It is done here, but although a quick and effective way of testing an undercarriage, it is one of those things that are NOT done.'[2] Blondie, aka Peake, did see it and was far from pleased with this representation of a clear violation of regulations. Shortly afterwards, Henderson was dismissed.

Paul Nash fared little better. His appointment demonstrates the importance Clark placed on recording the contributions of the RAF. Like Henderson, Nash was an official artist of the First World War, but his harrowing pictures of trench warfare attracted far greater acclaim. During the interwar period he had risen to become one of the leading figures in the British art scene and was a pioneer of the romantic style that Clark favoured. Nash was excited about the pictorial possibilities war offered. In the late 1930s, he focused on developing the surreal aspects of his work. Writing in *The Listener* in November 1939, he noted that the war had an 'unreal dream-like complexion'.[3] War therefore offered Nash new forms through which to extend and develop existing themes in his work. Soon after the formation of the WAAC was announced, he wrote to Clark broaching the possibility of his employment. Nash asked if he

> could be given official facilities for recording monsters. I believe I could make something memorable. Monsters include … tanks, aeroplanes, blimps, mechanical personages of all kinds. I see these things as the protagonists of the war. This is the War of Machines and they have taken on human and animal appearance.[4]

In his 1942 essay 'The Personality of Planes', Nash recalled that on the outbreak of war 'everywhere one looked, alarming and beautiful monsters appeared … these things each possessed a personality … "a life of their own"'.[5] That Nash saw monsters was hardly surprising, given the project he was working on at the outbreak of war. Nash first discovered the 'Monster Field' while staying with friends in Gloucestershire in June 1938. He was struck by the remains of two lighting-struck elm trees and photographed them extensively, working them up into paintings in 1939. For Nash these trunks were monsters with a life of their own. Searching for their resemblance, Nash recalled Blake's representation of cherubim horses, the 'sightless couriers of the air'. Nash wondered, 'Did it then crash to earth, fusing its image with the rigid tree?'[6] These images were fresh in Nash's mind when he came to paint his first images for the WAAC. Coming across the wreckage of planes in the landscape, Nash found this subject had a 'strong and natural appeal' because the planes, like the fallen trees, were 'out of their element'.[7]

The first series of paintings that Nash delivered to the WAAC were of crashed German aircraft. The series, known collectively as *Marching against England*, forged connections with his peacetime work. The planes were located in places that Nash had repeatedly painted: in *Dead March* (1940), a German plane has crashed on the shore at Dymchurch; the cliffs of Swanage frame the wreckage in *Down in the Channel* (1940);

Encounter in the Afternoon (1940), which took its name from a 1936 composition of his, depicted Silbury Hill in the background; while in *Bomber in the Corn* (1940), the wreckage is strewn about the landscape in a formation reminiscent of Avebury ring. During the 1930s, Nash obsessively painted the standing stones around Avebury. This scene interested him because of the interplay between the natural landscape and the man-made stones, which he found

> impressive as forms opposed to their surroundings, both by virtue of their actual composition of lines and masses and planes, directions and volumes; and in their irrational sense, their suggestion of a super-reality. They are dramatic, also, however as symbols of their antiquity, as hallowed remnants of an unknown civilisation.[8]

The crashed planes become one more way in which Nash could continue to explore his fascination with the interplay between the man-made and the natural. Like standing stones, the planes represented yet another layer of the national history inscribed on the landscape.

While Nash was undoubtedly pursuing his personal interests in these images, he also hoped they would have a propagandist function. Nash was keen that as an artist he could contribute to the propaganda war. He voiced this ambition in his letters to the WAAC:

> I am passionately anxious just to strike a blow on behalf of the R.A.F, apart from any triumph of art for its own sake. I am acutely conscious of the position I hold and what I believe to be its responsibility. I want to use what art I have and what I can make as directly as possible in the character of a weapon. I have always believed in the power of pictorial art as a means of propaganda … *quickly* striking and leaving an impression before any power can prevent the impact.[9]

Nash asserted that he embarked on the *Marching against England* series because of 'their propaganda value encouraging for our people and depressing for the enemy'.[10] Indeed, the series title subverted a German propaganda song of the same name. Nash mocked the song's ambitions, commenting 'what German foot … has so far trod English soil? Only airmen tipped out of their crippled machines'.[11] The WAAC were pleased with the images and the minutes note that they regarded them as 'the best work sent in so far by any artist'.[12] This view was not, however, unanimous. Peake commented that he thought portraits of British planes would have more appeal than images of crashed planes 'for the same reason that pictures of horses are much more attractive to hunting men than are pictures of the dead fox'![13]

Nash's next series of paintings, *Aerial Creatures*, were portraits of British planes, but these were also not to Peake's taste (see Figure 5.7). In the essay 'The Personality of Planes', Nash recalled his initial thoughts when he first encountered these immense weapons of war:

> All had individual beauty in terms of colour, form and line, but beyond, or was it *behind*, that actual appearance, these things possessed each a personality, difficult

> to define and yet undeniable. It was not wholly a matter of mechanistic character. There seemed to be involved some *other* animation – 'a life of their own' is the nearest plain expression I can think of – which often gave them the suggestion of human or animal features.[14]

Concerned with this anthropomorphic understanding of aircraft, Nash paid little attention to either the actual structure of the planes or the men who flew them. This did little to repair the relationship with the Air Ministry and in November 1940, Clark wrote to inform Nash that the Ministry would not be renewing his contract as 'there are a certain number of them led by Peake who yearn for the Royal Academy style, and they are determined to have it.'[15] Freed from the constraints of the Air Ministry's tastes, Nash continued to explore his fascination with aerial warfare and went on to produce one of the most iconic paintings of the Second World War, *Battle of Britain*, which was purchased by the WAAC (see Figure 3.1).

This was one of Clark's favourite paintings from the collection, so it offers a good insight into how he ideally would have liked Fighter Command to be represented. Clark declared this painting to be 'one of the most thrilling works of art yet produced by the war'. Nash, he believed, had 'discovered a new form of allegorical painting … a way of making symbols out of the events themselves'.[16] On one level *Battle of Britain* was a representation of the event: we are shown the fighter planes, the dog fights, the approaching squadron of bombers, parachutes and barrage balloons. For Nash, however, the image was more than just a narrative of the summer of 1940 and he stressed the symbolic qualities of the painting.[17] He had, as Clark recognized, harnessed the event to articulate the wider propagandist portrayal of the war. *Battle of Britain* presents a fight between good and evil. While dark clouds linger over the continent, Britain's skies are clear and blue. White trails are made by the British planes,

Figure 3.1 Paul Nash, *Battle of Britain*, 1941. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

whereas the German bombers leave a dark residue in their wake. This dichotomy is reinforced by the contrast between the organic shapes made by the British planes and the regimented formation of approaching German bombers. Mirroring the contours of the river, the British planes appear to emerge like a flower from the landscape. Nash here drew upon the association between landscape and Englishness to transform Fighter Command into an embodiment of the nation and the values it was fighting for. Clark's enthusiasm for the painting therefore suggests he favoured art that accorded with the broader oppositional propaganda framework which he had been instrumental in developing as the Controller of Home Publicity at the MOI.

Peake's priorities were somewhat different. After the dismissal of Nash, he argued that 'the Air Ministry are particularly in need of really good portraits of the finest pilots in the Air Force'.[18] If we look at the images of the RAF eventually amassed by the WAAC, it appears that Peake largely got his way. After the debacle with Henderson and Nash, of the two artists assigned to the RAF at any time, one was always a portraitist and of the 900 RAF-related images eventually collected by the WAAC, 40 per cent were portraits. This proportion was considerably higher than the other services: just 20 per cent of the Admiralty's and 10 per cent of the Army's images were portraits.[19]

Why were the RAF so keen on portraiture? As Brian Foss has highlighted, this is in part explicable by the relatively junior status of the air force.[20] The RAF was the newest branch of the services and during the 1920s and early 1930s its independent status had come under sustained attack as the services battled over limited treasury resources.[21] The RAF countered such an attack on a material level by emphasizing the threat posed by air attack, while on a symbolic level they attempted to bolster its status through the development of traditional military rituals as evinced, for example, by the Hendon Pageant.[22] Given the role of the RAF in the Second World War, the Air Ministry were keen to further cement its status by presenting the service within established modes of military representation. Traditional battle scenes were, however, difficult to produce in the Second World War, given the pace of mechanized warfare, the geographical reach of the conflict and the subordinate relationship of men to machines. As Foss argues, 'The only way to reinvest war painting with some of its traditional bravado and glory was to transfer those qualities to portraiture.'[23] While this provides some explanation for the Air Ministry's fondness for portraiture, by the outbreak of war the RAF had been in existence for twenty years. During this time, modes of representing the air force were established. As the following section explores, since the First World War aerial warfare was presented primarily through the heroism of the individual pilot. As such, the heroic portraiture of the Second World War must be understood as a continuance of this tradition.

The representation of the Royal Flying Corps

Aviation lent itself to the creation of modern heroes. Ever since the Wright brothers took their first tentative flight, the early pioneers of aviation awed the public with their daring feats, their voyages into the uncharted realm of the sky and their skill and intimacy with the aeroplane, an icon of the achievements of modern technology.[24]

While we can trace the popular exaltation of the pilot right back to the beginnings of flight, the particular mode of heroic representation that came to maturity during the Second World War had its roots in the First World War.

In 1917, speaking to the House of Commons, Lloyd George described the feats of the airmen of the RFC:

> High above the squalor and the mud … they fight out eternal issues of right and wrong. Their daily … struggles are like the Miltonic conflict between the winged hosts of light and darkness. … Every flight is a romance; every report is an epic. They are the knighthood of the war, without fear and without reproach. They recall the old legends of chivalry, not merely the daring of their exploits, but the nobility of their spirit, and, amongst the multitude of heroes, let us think of the chivalry of the air.[25]

It is hard to find a reference to the RFC which doesn't draw comparison between pilots and knights or other bits of chivalric legend. During the nineteenth century there was a revival of medieval heroic cults, as exemplified by the novels of Walter Scott. A generation of children was brought up on a diet of battle stories which presented war as a noble crusade in which, through their heroic actions, boys could prove themselves to be gentlemen.[26] This culture presented a romanticized image of war, of battles won and lost by the courage and skill of the individual warrior. This bore little relation to the realities of mass mechanized trench warfare; however, this chivalric culture of war could be mapped on to aerial warfare. The war in the air was presented as a highly individual sphere. Rather than a battle between two opposing air forces, aerial combat was presented as a series of duels between brave and skilful lone aviators. The number of enemy planes each pilot brought down was recorded and fame came to those with the highest tallies. During the war both enemy and allied 'aces' such as Albert Ball, Edward Munnock, René Fonck and the German Red Baron, Manfred von Richthofen, became household names. This was encouraged by the British government who introduced the Distinguished Flying Cross, awarded to those pilots who could claim eight victories and for individual acts of courage. This established a tradition of viewing the air force through the heroic actions of individual pilots.

This was reinforced by the continual revisiting of the exploits of the RFC in interwar culture. Britain in this period has been cast as a society that recoiled from celebratory images of war. Studies, such as those by Paul Fussell and Samuel Hynes, have focused scholarly attention on the literature of disillusionment: the work of Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves and others.[27] This sort of literary response to the war was by no means homogenous. If we turn our attention away from more elite forms of culture, and look instead at popular films and fiction, we can see the continuation of heroic and exciting images of war.[28] A thriving cultural industry grew up around the cult of the aviator. The RFC was celebrated in films such as *Wings* (1927), *Dawn Patrol* (1930) and *Hell's Angels* (1930).[29] Memoirs and biographies of pilots, which had begun to appear before the war had concluded, multiplied in the 1920s and 1930s. The heroic airman was a stock character in juvenile fiction. In books and in the boys' papers, Biggles and co. re-enacted dogfights over the trenches and took on new enemies across

the Empire.[30] The forms which accounts of the air war took are significant. To engage the audience, both films and fictions required strong characters. The story of the air war was therefore narrated through the actions of the protagonist. Likewise, memoirs also gave an individual account of the air war. This reinforced the tradition of viewing the air force through the heroic deeds of individual pilots.

The critique of war was accommodated within the celebratory culture of aerial warfare. For example, Thirty, a character in W. E. John's *Biggles* series, mused on the meaning of war:

> For the first time he began to perceive what war really meant; he felt the relentlessness of it – the ruthlessness, the waste, the cruelty, the incredible folly of it. It gave him a shock to realise that he did not really know what everyone was fighting for. Something about Belgium … Freedom.[31]

Nevertheless, this was an aside in a book that was otherwise a heroic narrative. On the whole, critiques of the war were confined to descriptions of trench warfare and authors and directors sought to distance this from the war in the air. For example, Cecil Lewis in his memoir *Sagittarius Rising* (1936) contrasted the glory of flying with the carnage in the trenches below. As a pilot he was glad that he did not sit in the mud 'while some one who had no personal enmity against you loosed off a gun, five miles away, and blew you to smithereens'. This he felt was not fighting 'it was murder. Senseless, brutal, ignoble.' Aerial combat, however, was comparable to 'the lists of the Middle Ages, the only sphere in modern warfare where a man saw his adversary and faced him in mortal combat, the only sphere where there was still chivalry and honour. If you won, it was your own bravery and skill; if you lost, it was because you had met a better man.' He described the 'magnetism' between aerial fighters involved in combat. When he shot down his opponent he thought, 'what a glorious and heroic death! What a brave man!'[32] The sentiments of the literature of disillusionment were therefore acknowledged in relation to trench warfare; however, the war in the air was described in ways akin to the romantic and heroic nineteenth-century culture of war.

The contrast between trench and aerial warfare was also evoked to mark the modernity of the pilot. In the film *Wings* (1927), the push on the ground is viewed from above in an ambitious restaging of the Battle of St. Mihiel. From this perspective the futility of trench warfare is exposed. Line after line of soldiers are slain as they are unable to counter the mechanical power of the tank and the machine gun. Inhabiting a separate sphere of action, the freedom of the pilot is contrasted against the stagnation on the ground. Seeing the plight of the armies below, the pilot swoops down disabling the fortified machine gun placement and injecting movement once again into the battle below. The pilot and the soldier therefore represented two very different relationships between man and the machine. While the army is revealed as powerless in the face of this mechanical onslaught, the pilot has mastery over the machine, marking him as a distinctly modern combatant.

It was not only the pilots' relationship with the machine that marked them as exemplars of the modern man. While cases of shell shock gave rise to fears about psychological degeneration and a crisis in modern masculinity, representations of the pilot stressed

their mental robustness.[33] Accounts of the air war acknowledged the psychological strain of combat. When W. E. Johns first introduced Biggles to his readership, he noted that on his young face 'the strain of war, and sight of sudden death, had already graven little lines.' Despite his nonchalant attitude 'the irritating little falsetto laugh which continually punctuated his tale betrayed the frayed condition of his nerves.'[34] Nevertheless, rather than collapse under this strain, Biggles continued his missions without complaint, courageously facing mortal danger. Death is an ever-present theme in Cecil Lewis's memoir. While many of those around him die, Lewis is marked by his propensity to survive. This proximity to death adds to his heroic stature. To continue to function under this continual mortal threat required, argued Lewis, a certain individual psychological courage 'a sort of plodding fatalism, a determination, a cold-blooded effort of will, and always alone!'[35] Such qualities marked the pilot as an example of masculinity capable of rising to meet the psychological challenges of modern life.

By the outbreak of the Second World War, modes of representing aerial warfare were firmly established. The nineteenth-century romanticized culture of war was appropriated to depict the air war as a series of duels between individual aviators who were cast as the modern equivalents of chivalric knights. The pilots' mental robustness and mastery of technology were mapped onto these traditional heroic constructions to create an icon of modern manhood.

Representations of Fighter Command during the Second World War were heavily indebted to this existing image of the pilot. Churchill, for instance, referred to the men of the RAF as 'these noble knights'.[36] The Air Ministry's official account of the Battle of Britain likened aerial combat to 'a duel with rapiers fought by masters of the art of fence.'[37] The individualized perspective was again reinforced by the forms through which the battle was narrated. Pilots' first-hand accounts of the air war were broadcast on the BBC and reproduced as popular pamphlets.[38] In the Air Ministry's account of *The Battle of Britain*, descriptions of combat were an assemblage of quotations from pilots regaling their own finest moments. New pilot memoirs appeared and the press continued to laud the ace. This individualized perspective shaped the way the public viewed the air force. Mass Observation found that people admired the RAF as a brilliant set of individuals, whereas the other services tended to be viewed as more anonymous organizations.[39] The Air Ministry's fondness for portraiture must be understood within this context. As the first Director of the RAF's public relations, Harald Peake was responsible for the production of the Air Ministry's official accounts, he orchestrated the series of BBC talks and he controlled the images, films and information given to the media. It is not surprising, therefore, that he sought to project a similar image of the RAF through war art.

The portraits of Eric Kennington

After the dismissal of Henderson and Nash, Eric Kennington was assigned to the RAF. Kennington's background predisposed him to produce the heroic images that the Air Ministry sought. He had begun his career as an illustrator for the *Boy's Own Paper*, which titillated readers with heroic stories of war and Empire. During the First

World War he served briefly as a private in the Kensingtons, before being invalided home after shooting himself in the foot in 1915. He was selected as an official war artist in 1917. His experience in the trenches meant that Kennington was sceptical of romantic accounts of the war. Writing to his brother in 1915, he pointed out that 'fighting in Flanders France in winter means standing in mud and ice up to your balls and, perhaps, in places up to your chest and not changing for a week after'.[40] Such experiences gave Kennington a considerable admiration for the ordinary soldier who endured these horrific conditions. On his return from the front line, he informed the MOI that 'if I am of any use, it is in depicting British soldiers in their truest and noblest aspect, of that work I shall never tire'.[41]

The paintings that he subsequently produced represented the horrors of modern warfare while elevating the ordinary soldier to heroic status. *The Kensingtons at Laventie,* for example, conveyed the suffering of the troops. They appear dishevelled, exhausted and injured, as Kennington emphasized in the accompanying text of an exhibition catalogue: 'Platoon No. 7, C. Company … has served in the fire-trench for four days and nights, enduring the piercing cold of twenty degrees [below zero] of frost and almost continuous snow … sleep has been well-nigh impossible and the men are very tired.'[42] Nevertheless, they are only pausing before marching another five miles. Despite the hardships these men have suffered, they continue to fight. From this they acquire their heroic status. This painting also suggests that Kennington's admiration rested primarily with the ordinary soldier. The officer is spatially separated from the rest of the company, and his appearance suggests that his experience of war has been made somewhat easier by his rank. His ability to acknowledge both the hardships of war and the heroism of the ordinary soldier won Kennington considerable critical acclaim. The art critic of the *Times* praised Kennington for painting war 'in all its squalor and glory' while Campbell Dodgson exalted Kennington as 'a born painter of the nameless heroes of the rank and file'.[43] The type of heroism Kennington portrayed was therefore very different to that imbued in the RFC. While the named individual aces among the elite group of flyers were celebrated for their daring and dashing combat, in Kennington's images it is the mass of ordinary and anonymous soldiers who, through their suffering and endurance, gain heroic status.

During the interwar years Kennington continued to explore the complexities of the modern heroic character through his depictions of T. E. Lawrence. Lawrence is a key figure to consider when thinking about interwar forms of heroic masculinity.[44] In many ways, the fantasy that attached itself to Lawrence was very similar to the representation of the RFC. He was first brought to the public's attention by the journalist Lowell Thomas. Unable to find any heroic stories on the Western Front, Thomas had been instructed by John Buchan, Director of Information at the MOI, to 'search the Middle East for war stories more uplifting than any to be found in the Flanders quagmire'.[45] Like the representation of the RFC, the Lawrence legend was crafted in opposition to the war in the trenches. The character of Lawrence was also an amalgamation of traditional and modern notions of manhood. He was imbued with chivalric qualities. Kennington himself made this association in the reclining effigy he carved after Lawrence's death in 1935, which memorialized him in the form of an English Knight. Other tributes stressed that while the tales of his heroic exploits transported the reader

'back to the days of medieval chivalry', he also bore the scars of modern trauma.[46] Churchill commented that the 'sufferings and stresses he had undergone, both physical and psychic, during the War had left their scars and injuries upon him. … He was capable of suffering mental pain in an exceptional degree.'[47]

Kennington captured this in two representations of Lawrence that he completed during the 1920s. In the first, a bold pastel portrait, which featured in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1922), the distinctive style in which he would later render his images of the RAF is already evident. The bust of Lawrence (Figure 3.2) depicted him as a member of the RAF. This was Kennington's first foray into the representation of an aviator. Lawrence was impressed by the bust:

> Magnificent; there is no other word for it. It represents not me but my top moments, those few seconds when I succeed in thinking myself right out of things. … You

Figure 3.2 Eric Kennington, *Portrait Bust of T. E. Lawrence*, 1926–7. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.

> have simplified out, and simplified out, and concentrated on what you liked of the material to your hands, and produced – well I liken it to a cross between that Giottesque Dante, and the Gattamelata – Colleone.[48]

The bust displayed Kennington's tendency towards the traditional heroic but was not simply a romanticized portrayal. In both this piece and the pastel rendition, the tension in the facial muscles, particularly around the eyes, serves as a reminder of Lawrence's more complex psychological makeup that marked him as a distinctly modern hero.

Kennington therefore possessed a developed visual language of modern heroics when he was appointed as the RAF's artist at the end of 1940. Over the next two years he produced over 150 life-sized portraits. These were among the most widely disseminated images in the collection. They were a consistent feature in the WAAC exhibitions, and a third of the pictures in the RAF edition of the OUP *War Pictures by British Artists* series were portraits by Kennington. Moreover, although not sponsored by the WAAC, two collections of Kennington's images were published in book form and proved popular. Fifty-two portraits were assembled in *Drawing the RAF* (1942) while Kennington's brother paid for the publication of *Pilots, Workers, Machines* (1941), to inspire workers in his factory making aircraft components. Beaverbrook, the Minister of Aircraft Production, was so impressed with the propagandist potential of this publication that he ordered 50,000 for wider distribution[49] (see Figure 3.3).

Kennington certainly painted heroes. While distinctly modern, the formal pose and gaze of the sitter and the prominent inclusion of the insignia on the lapel places these images within the canon of traditional military portraiture. The sitter is viewed from a low perspective and the viewer looking upwards in admiration. The intense colouration makes the men appear almost superhuman. These already heroic images were exaggerated by the context in which they were disseminated. Each portrait was accompanied by a short blurb detailing the sitter's particular heroic deeds; every single member of Fighter Command featured in Kennington's *Drawing the RAF* had been awarded a medal for gallantry. The introductions that prefaced his publications were rousing and patriotic. In *Pilots, Workers, Machines*, J. B. Priestley proclaimed that the men pictured within had 'not only saved Britain from defeat but probably saved the civilised world from extinction'. He placed the pilots within a narrative of British heroism: 'They have a kind of Elizabethan dash and superb impudence, as if they were all descendants of Drake and Hawkins.' The airman, he continued, is 'not only a hero, but an example so terrifying to most of us, grumbling and fumbling away at life, that we are inclined to wish we had never been told about the fellow.' Priestley, like Nash, harnessed Fighter Command to articulate the oppositional presentation of the war. The dogfights in the skies above Southern England were battles between 'two different points of view, two different philosophies of life'. While in the First World War chivalric qualities were imbued in allied and enemy airmen alike, Priestley defined the pilots of the RAF against their German counterparts:

> I can tell you best what they are not like. They are not like the Nazi airmen. To begin with, although their long period of strenuous training takes them far from home, they are not really cut off in spirit from the civilian community, and do not

Figure 3.3 Eric Kennington, *Squadron Leader Leslie Vero Everest Atkinson*, 1941. Courtesy of the RAF Museum.

> think of themselves as a special privileged caste, whose task it is to be the spearhead of the state's brutality and bullying power. … they do not think of themselves as warrior airmen first and then only secondly of themselves as human beings who are members of a community. ... They love flying itself, but are as well aware of the fundamental idiocy of this huge aerial warfare, with its vast cost and often indiscriminate destruction, as any thoughtful civilian is.[50]

For Priestley, airmen embodied the set of binary opposites that structured the propagandist portrayal of the war. The Luftwaffe were an elite warrior caste, symptomatic of the aggressive militarization of German society under the Nazis. In contrast, the men of the RAF were essentially ordinary peaceable civilians, archetypes of the people's war.

The trouble was that this description of the German airman displayed many similarities to the interwar image of the British aviator. Aviation lent itself to the creation of a technological elite. In an age where flying has become almost mundane, it is hard to imagine just how awesome flight was in this period. The sky after all was the realm of Gods and divine creatures. When man invaded this space a little of this mystique was transferred and a division between the 'godlings' and the 'groundlings' conferred. Aviation, like other advanced technologies, created a hierarchy between those with an intimate knowledge and understanding of the machine and those that could only stare in awe without comprehension. While this contributed to the wonder of modern technology, it was also emotionally and intellectually overpowering.[51] Such sensations are associated with the sublime. While an encounter with sublime sites in nature makes the observer feel weakness and awe at the superior power of god or nature, if the sublime object is man-made, this feeling is redirected onto those associated with the technology.[52] Writers dwelt on the intimate relationship between aviator and aircraft. Seeing the shadow of the pilot and plane on a cloud, Cecil Lewis observed a surrounding 'bright halo of light, and outside that a perfect circular rainbow'.[53] Drawing on religious imagery, Lewis cultivated the deification of man and machine: 'The majesty of the heavens, while it dwarfed us, gave us, I think, a spirit unknown to sturdier men who fought on earth. Nobility surrounded us.'[54] This experience, he thought, set the airman apart from the rest of humanity and he continually referred to pilots as 'my breed'.[55] From the air, Lewis saw man below 'with detachment, dispassionately: a strange, pitiable, crawling race, to us who strode the sky. Vain the heroic gesture, puny the great thought! Poor little maggoty men!'[56]

In literature, writers brought out the more sinister connotations of this idea by positioning the aviator as the leader of a technocratic dictatorship. Such an idea was advanced by Rudyard Kipling as early as 1905 in *With the Night Mail* and developed in his 1912 *As Easy as ABC*. Kipling presented the reader with a dystopian vision of a future where a small cadre of scientists and technicians, known as the Aerial Board of Control, seize power and rule under the motto 'transportation is civilisation, democracy is disease.' The most prominent example of this sort of story in the interwar period was H. G. Wells's *The Shape of Things to Come*. After years of war and disease, the Air Control seize power to restore civilization. Wells describes their rule as having a 'masochist and sadistic flavour'.[57] The 1936 film of the novel was more explicit and clothed the airmen in black shirts; the resemblance to the costumes of the British Union of Fascists was widely commented on at the time.[58] Aviation occupied a prominent position in both Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany. Both harnessed the aeroplane as a metaphor for the new fascist order that they strove to forge.[59] In Britain too there was an affinity between aviation and the far right. Oswald Mosley, himself a former member of the RFC, formed the fascist flying clubs in 1934. Well-known individuals associated with aviation, such as AV Roe and Lady Houston, supported Moseley, and the British Union of Fascists contained a disproportionate number of aviators.[60] The industry's trade paper *The Aeroplane* openly supported Hitler and Mussolini and embraced their ideology. For instance, an editorial from 1936 remarked:

> Thanks largely to the German leader, Adolf Hitler, and to the Italian Dictator, Signor Mussolini, we are now well on the way towards building up an Air Force

> which in due course will enable us to help them and the United States to meet the real enemies of civilisation, the Russians and the Japanese. Perhaps I should say enemies of the White Race, or human sub-species.[61]

This association between aviation and fascism continued into the war. In Rex Warner's 1941 book *The Aerodrome*, the air force is used as a metaphor for a totalitarian regime and the book explores the conflict between the aerodrome and the rural village it is situated in – a quintessential symbol of the English nation. As Warner suggests, certain ideas associated with the aviator bore more relation to the values Britain was fighting against, than those it was fighting for.

The other problem with the attempt to locate the fighter pilot within the broader presentation of Britain at war was that as well as being a technocratic elite, pilots were also a social elite. Although there were exceptions, the RFC recruited mainly from the public schools. Their fictional counterparts, such as Biggles, were invariably of similar social class. The chivalric language used to describe their feats was therefore apt, given that the very idea of the Knight was an elite aristocratic warrior. During the interwar period, the RAF strove to present itself as a meritocratic service that granted opportunities to those who displayed the necessary technical competence and character. However, as Martin Francis has highlighted, 'most senior RAF commanders identified good character in terms of the qualities exemplified by the private schools and elite universities they themselves had attended. As a consequence, pilot selection proved to be heavily dependent on possession of the right accent or the familiar stripes of an old school tie.'[62] During the 1930s, recruitment efforts were targeted at public schools, with liaison officers assigned to individual schools.[63] The nature of the entrance exams and the cost of fees for Cranwell, the RAF's officer training school, excluded those from more modest backgrounds.[64] Indeed, a survey shows that around 70 per cent of those who graduated from Cranwell between 1934 and 1939 were educated at public schools.[65]

This was compounded by the other routes by which pilots reached Fighter Command. The first of these was the University Air Squadrons, established at Oxford and Cambridge in the mid-1920s and at London in 1935. Reflecting the nature of these institutions, these schemes largely attracted the upper classes. The Auxiliary Air Force was also formed in the mid-1920s to draw recreational flyers into the service. Given the exorbitant costs of flying, membership of these squadrons was highly exclusive. The first two squadrons, 600 and 601, drew predominantly from White's club and the city of London.[66] Harald Peake found his way into the service through this route. In 1936 he founded the 609 squadron. Peake, an old Etonian and former chairman of Lloyds, recruited from the big land owning and industrial families of Yorkshire and stipulated that all entrants must have a public school and a university background. The Auxiliary squadrons eventually formed a quarter of Fighter Command's strength at the outbreak of war.[67]

There were some perceptible shifts in the class makeup of the RAF in the late 1930s. As war approached and the RAF intensified its expansion, they launched the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. This opened up flying to individuals from a wider range of backgrounds. Nevertheless, the Reserves were by no means a representative cross

section of society; most places were allocated to those who had attended red brick universities, grammar schools or technical colleges.[68] Moreover, this process of social diversification only really began to be felt after the Battle of Britain had begun, as recruits from these schemes were drafted into the much-depleted squadrons. During the war itself, the RAF continued to focus its recruitment schemes at the public schools. They sent pilots into schools to encourage the boys to enlist at eighteen, and in 1941, the Air Ministry asked Charles Graves to write a book, *The Thin Blue Line*, specifically to encourage public school boys to sign up.[69] A 1941 Mass Observation survey found that class divisions persisted within the RAF. Among the ground crew, who made up around 90 per cent of the service, 'a very frequent source of resentment is the reservation by the ruling class of practically all the flying jobs for themselves'.[70] The image of Fighter Command during the Second World War reflected the social makeup of the service. In Richard Hillary's *Last Enemy*, the bestselling memoir of the period, Hillary and the rest of the long-haired boys are all drawn from the public schools and Oxbridge. The biographies in Kennington's publications highlighted the flyer's prestigious educational background and extolled their sporting achievements and gentlemanly qualities. This elite image of the pilot fitted ill within the broader projection of an egalitarian people's war.

Propagandists attempted to reconcile the existing image of the pilot with the broader propagandist themes of the war by emphasizing the ordinariness of the airmen. In the WAAC 1941 exhibition catalogue, Eric Newton described the pilots as 'ordinary men caught up in an epic that has increased their stature and turned them into heroes despite themselves.'[71] Likewise, in the introduction to a selection of his pictures, artist Cuthbert Orde wrote:

> The most striking feature of the Fighter pilots … is their ordinariness. Just 'You, I, Us, and Co.,' ordinary sons of ordinary parents from ordinary homes. So when you wonder where they come from, dear reader, whoever you may be, contemplate your own home, your family, your profession, and your background, and you have the answer. … They are not a race apart.[72]

In *Pilots, Workers, Machines*, Priestley also emphasized the pilots' ordinariness: 'Nearly all airmen come from the great middle section of British society. … Their parents have rarely been either very rich or very poor. They have mostly not known either great mansions or slums … they truly represent the middle classes from which they are drawn. Such qualities as they have are not unknown to their fathers and mothers, their sisters and younger brothers, their wives and sweethearts.'[73] This reinforced notions of the conflict as a people's war fought by exemplary but ordinary civilians.

Kennington's portraits conveyed little of this sense of ordinary heroism. Some found this problematic. Critic Herbert Furst found that the portraits made him feel 'uneasy ... I feel as if I have awakened in Valhalla'. He has made his sitters look like 'heroes, every inch of them. ... But what though of ordinary people ... Mr Kennington would be greater, one feels, if he practised at least a little of that outstanding virtue of his heroes: understatement.' Similarly, in *The Scotsman* the reviewer felt that leafing through *Drawing the RAF* his 'scepticism is stirred simply because these

young knights of the air look so knightly'.[74] Kenneth Clark was unusually critical of Kennington's images. In an interview for *Studio*, Clark admitted that he felt Kennington's work was

> not to everyone's taste; indeed taste is a word which I am sure he would hate to hear mentioned in connection with his work. No one can deny his mastery, his seriousness of purpose and his extraordinary power of combining resemblance with heroic idealisation. He is at his best when this idealisation is not pressed too far … for is it not a fallacy to make all heroes look so very heroic?

Clark directed the reader instead to consider the work of William Dring: 'His brave men are modest, gentle and completely unconscious of having done anything out of the ordinary; and we believe in their courage all the more because they are such sympathetic human beings.'[75]

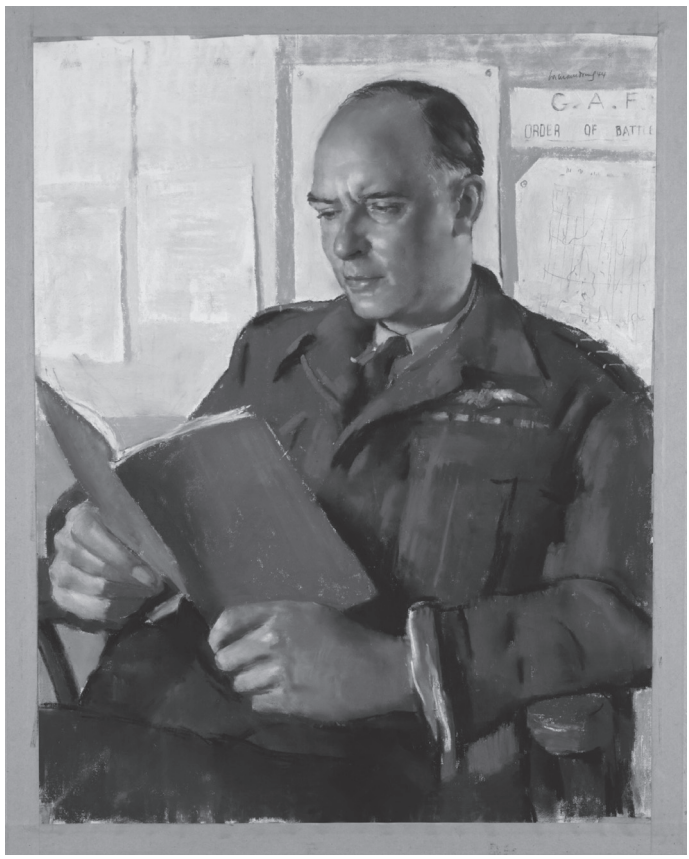

Figure 3.4 William Dring, *Squadron Leader Laurence Irving*, 1944. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

In Dring's portrait of *Squadron Leader Laurence Irving* (Figure 3.4), apart from the uniform, there is little to distinguish the sitter casually reading the book from any other ordinary civilian. Unlike Kennington, who framed his portraits as sculptural busts, Dring emphasized the body and particularly the workman-like hands. A sense of the everyday and the ordinary pervade this image. That Clark should favour the ordinariness of Dring's pilots to the exaggerated heroism he perceived in Kennington's portraits again demonstrates his preference for representations of the RAF which accorded with the wider presentation of the war.

Dring's paintings, however, failed to capture the public imagination in the same way as Kennington's. The Mass Observers at both the 1940 and 1941 National Gallery exhibitions noted that Kennington's images were a particular favourite among visitors.[76] His portraits were frequently reproduced in the press and publications of his works sold well. Kennington was also popular with the men he depicted and the WAAC received many letters from RAF bases requesting prints to hang in the mess.[77] Kennington's heroic warriors resonated with the public imagination in a way that Dring's ordinary men did not. Since the invention of flight, the pilot had been represented as extraordinary. He was a knightly warrior – a technological and social elite. By 1939, this image was deeply engrained in the popular imagination and it remained resonant throughout the war. In the summer of 1940, Britain was in a precarious position and although its continual survival was down to many factors, the visibility of aerial combat in the skies above Southern England made it seem that Fighter Command were 'the few' to whom the nation was indebted. Aerial combat itself was glamorous and romantic and when pilots attempted to describe their experiences, they inevitably turned to the chivalric language they had grown up reading in Biggles and co. Given the high losses the RAF sustained, these young pilots displayed great bravery and courage each time they flew. For Fighter Command at least, combat remained a relatively individual sphere of modern mass warfare. Moreover, fighter pilots were, at least at the outset of war, predominately drawn from the upper classes. The idea of the ordinary pilot just didn't ring true. Propaganda constructs had to bear some relation to the ways in which the public perceived the war if they were to be successful.

The construction of the hero, however, remained problematic. Traditional modes of heroic representation could appear Germanic. Type portraiture, for example, which deemphasized individual personality in favour of abstract qualities or values, was irrevocably associated with fascist art and the WAAC avoided acquiring images of this sort.[78] Although Kennington meticulously recorded the individual details of each sitter, his tendencies towards type portraiture were observed contemporaneously, although often in a complementary tone. While the reviewer in the *Times Literature Supplement* acknowledged Kennington had 'not suppressed individuality in favour of a type', he noted that he brought out 'common characteristics' that give the 'impression of a new and separate race of men'.[79] Similarly, in the introduction to the WAAC's book of RAF images, H. E. Bates said of Kennington's work:

> If you wish to find evidence that this is a war of beliefs among people rather than differences between peoples it is here also among the faces. There are English faces

> here of unmistakable Teutonic lines; there are Polish faces here that seem to be quietly alive with English humour. All have a common quality that is hard, perhaps impossible to define.[80]

Part of this quality inevitably derived from Kennington's distinctive style, but he did at times display an inclination towards type portraiture. This was regarded as a step too far and he was discouraged by Peake.[81]

Kennington's images were also criticized for the form of masculinity they appeared to embody. *The Times* felt his portraits marked by a 'strained and exaggerated intensity' while *Country Life* noted the 'furious maleness' of his images. Eric Newton complained that 'Kennington goes on and on with his over life-sized portraits of supermen. They are strident things whose assertiveness almost hurts one's eyes.'[82] Such a reaction was not confined to the art critics. One man at the July 1940 exhibition was overheard to comment that while he liked Kennington's portraits 'they're a bit hard for me'.[83] This 'hardness' was problematic considering the way that British masculinity was defined against representations of Nazism. While the Germans were assigned hyper-masculine qualities, British masculinity was fashioned from more temperate ideas of masculinity in currency during the interwar period.[84]

There was little temperate about many of Kennington's images. Kennington described Wing Commander Beamish as 'first, last and all time a fighter.'[85] The portrait (Figure 3.5) conveyed a strident and aggressive masculinity through the strong square line of the jaw and the muscular tension evident in the face. The qualities exuded by this portrait were more commonly associated with the militarism and hyper-masculinity of the Nazis than the more temperate and civilian forms of Britishness. Not all of Kennington's portraits, however, embodied this kind of masculinity. His depiction of Sergeants Harrison and Lacey (Figures 3.6 and 3.7) are far gentler in tone and eschewed established modes of heroic representation. We look down, not up, at Harrison. Their uniforms are scruffy and a little too big, and the cartoon detailing on Lacey's jacket is highlighted, emphasizing his youthfulness.

Kennington's work can be usefully compared to other artists working at the time. While attacking German invasion barges in 1940, Sergeant Hannah's Hampden received a direct hit and caught fire. Rather than abandon the plane, Hannah fought the vicious fire, receiving severe burns in the process. For this feat, aged eighteen, he became the youngest aerial recipient of the Victoria Cross. While the artist who illustrated the MOI book on Victoria Cross recipients chose to depict Hannah mid-action – fighting the fire, foregrounding his physical prowess – Kennington emphasized his youth: the boyish skin, the delicate jaw line and the sense that the uniform is a little too big (Figure 3.8). Hannah here appears childlike and effeminate. Kennington simply states, 'A fearless, virtuous child.'[86] Here Kennington constructs a very different notion of masculinity to that of his more strident and aggressive images. This more informal and gentle style was on the whole only applied to non-commissioned officers. When Kennington depicted officers in this style, it often hinted at their non-conventional social backgrounds. Wing Commander Carter, for example, had joined the RAF in 1927 as an aircraft apprentice after leaving grammar school. After winning a cadetship to Cranwell, he was promoted through the ranks.

Figure 3.5 Eric Kennington, *Wing Commander Francis Victor Beamish*, 1940. Courtesy of the RAF Museum.

Wittingly or not, Kennington registered the class divisions that persisted within the RAF well into the people's war.

The heroism of Kennington's images was also tempered by the acknowledgement of the physical and psychological fragility of the human body in modern mechanized warfare. Kennington's portraits pointed to the psychological strain caused by combat and the pilots' proximity to death. Although the muscular tension evident around the eyes could be interpreted as aggression, as discussed in relation to his portrait of Beamish, if the technique that Kennington utilized in his depictions of TE Lawrence is considered, this was also a way that he could hint at the psychological toll of war. This technique therefore tempered the hyper-masculinity of his portraits by alluding to the idea of a fractured masculinity that characterized both the Lawrence legend and the representation of the RFC in the

Figure 3.6 Eric Kennington, *Sergeant J. M. Harrison*, 1941. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

interwar period. This was observed by Priestley, who drew direct comparison between Kennington's depiction of Lawrence and his RAF portraits. Underlying both, he argued, was a particular type of masculinity. The essential character of Kennington's work, Priestley asserted, was that it was 'at once strong, very masculine, and yet at the same time sensitive, nervous'. He was, however, careful to disclaim that he meant nervous 'as a racehorse is nervous, and not as the term is applied to some pampered and neurotic woman.'[87] There was a wider acknowledgement of the strain that combat placed on pilot's mental health during the war. Lord David Cecil, in the introduction to Rothenstein's book of portraits, said:

> So dangerous a life leaves its mark on the nerves. The airman preserves a rigid appearance of imperturbability and good spirits; but one soon begins to realize that

Figure 3.7 Eric Kennington, *Sergeant James Harry Lacey*, 1941. Courtesy of the RAF Museum.

> they are living in a state of tension. The newspaper picture of the laughing aviator, carelessly risking his life, is not really a flattering likeness. It is no compliment to a man to say he is too insensitive to know when he is in danger. Anyway it seemed to me a false picture. Going down to the airfield with a group of men about to start on night operations, one notices that through the mask of self-control, their eyes gaze out serious and preoccupied.[88]

Introducing Ian Gleed's pilot memoirs in 1942, John Strachey, who was then a RAF publicity officer, argued that the pilots 'ultimate claim to glory' was that they felt fear. After all, the RAF were 'just young Englishmen with the same dislikes, likes, hopes, fears and expectations as the rest of their generation'. Such an emotional response

Figure 3.8 Eric Kennington, *Sergeant J. Hannah*, 1940. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

was in fact reassuring as it meant that the men of the RAF were not dehumanized like the 'Nazi or Japanese robots'.[89] This combination of ordinariness and an open acknowledgement of the psychological strains of combat further distanced the British airman from the hyper-masculine Nazi other.

Kennington also registered the physical injuries suffered by pilots. Given that they sat behind a tank of highly inflammable aviation fuel, accidents often inflicted horrific burns.[90] Advances in treatment, pioneered by the surgeon Archibald McIndoe, meant that many more burns victims survived, although permanently scarred by their severe injuries. A. R. Thomson recorded the painstaking process by which the pilots' damaged bodies were reconstructed in the painting *A Saline Bath* (Figure 3.9): patches

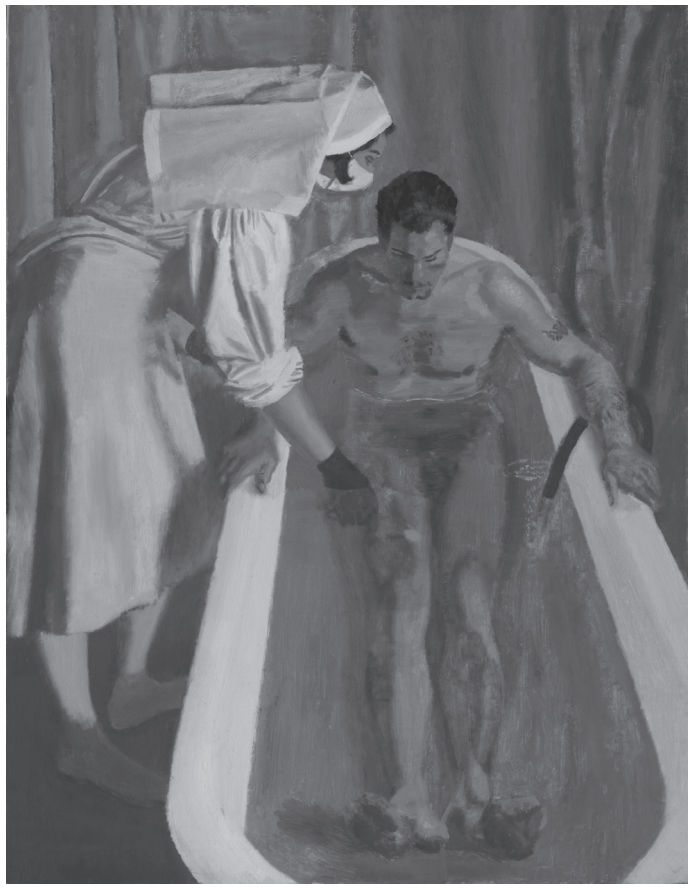

Figure 3.9 Alfred Reginald Thomson, *A Saline Bath, RAF Hospital*, 1943. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

of red raw scarring mottle his legs; hands grip the stark white sides; the body braced in response to pain. He surveys his naked, helpless, vulnerable body, yet his look is not one of anguish, but of concentration and determination. His powerful shoulders and muscular arms suggest vast reserves of physical strength. Through endurance and the ordeals of recovery, the wounded airman's heroic status is not diminished but transformed.

A similar sense of heroism is suggested by Kennington's portrait of one of the most famous wounded airmen of the war, Richard Hillary. Hillary's psychological and physical injuries are evident in Kennington's portrait (Figure 3.10). He appears anxious and unsettled. Despite the treatment he had received, his face remained extensively scarred. Kennington meticulously recorded these marks: the scarring from where his eyelids had been reconstructed; the eyes which lacked lashes, movement and expression; and the thin and pale upper lip. Inscribed in this image is the vulnerability of the body in mechanical warfare.

Figure 3.10 Eric Kennington, *Richard Hillary*, 1942. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.

Hillary shot to fame after the publication of *The Last Enemy* in 1942 – an account of his time in Fighter Command and his recovery from the horrific burns inflicted by a crash. There were of course countless pilot memoirs published during the war, but the a-typical nature of Hillary's account enhanced its prominence.[91] As the reviewer in the *Sunday Times* put it, 'Most pilots, unfortunately cannot write; most writers, unfortunately, cannot fly. The author … can not only fly; he can also write.'[92] While most memoirs simply described the routines of a pilot and the thrill of combat, *The Last Enemy* was a complex meditation on what it meant to be a hero during the Second World War. Hillary felt that 'much that is untrue and misleading has been written on the pilot in this war. Within one short year he has become the nation's hero, and the attempt to live up to this false conception bores him.'[93] He explains his motivation to write *The Last Enemy* as follows:

> I got so sick of the sop about our 'Island Fortress' and 'The Knights of the Air' that I determined to write it … in the hope that the next generation might realize that while stupid, we were not that stupid, that we could remember only too well that all this has been said in the last war, but that in spite of that and not because of it, we still thought this one worth fighting.[94]

Hillary emphasized the long shadow that the First World War cast over his generation. He described himself and his fellow undergraduates at Oxford in the late 1930s as united by 'a deep-rooted distrust of all organized emotion and patriotism'.[95] Even once training had begun, this sceptical attitude persisted and Hillary and his fellow pilots 'continued to refuse to consider the war in the light of a crusade for humanity, or a life-and-death struggle for civilisation, and concerned ourselves merely with what there was in it for us'.[96] He chastised his fellow pilot and friend Peter for his patriotism and religion, describing him as 'an anachronism. In an age when to love one's country is vulgar, to love God archaic, and to love mankind sentimental, you do all three.'[97] Nevertheless, the central narrative of the book described his conversion from sceptic to crusader. Although memoir, Hillary fictionalized crucial parts of the book, such as the episode in which he pulled an old lady from a blitzed house which sparked his personal epiphany:

> That that woman should so die was an enormity so great that it was terrifying in its implications, in its lifting of the veil. … It was not just the German bombs, or the German Air Force, or even the German mentality, but a feeling of the very essence of anti-life that no words could convey. … I had recognized in that moment what it was that Peter and the others had instantly recognized as evil and to be destroyed utterly. … With great clarity I saw myself suddenly as I was. Great God, that I could have been so arrogant![98]

This invented sequence created a classic narrative of self-discovery. Despite his initial reluctance to embrace patriotism, the circumstances he finds himself in force a realization of the values the nation is fighting for and an understanding of the war as a moral struggle against evil, echoing the broader way in which propagandist delineated the conflict.

Despite his ambition to dispel heroic myth, Hillary, through the act of writing, had turned himself into a hero**.** *The Last Enemy* was immediately successful and was reprinted three times in the three months following its initial release.[99] Although Hillary wanted to be a successful writer, he struggled to adjust to his fame and in the months following publication became withdrawn and depressed. It was at this point that he was introduced to Kennington. Hillary wrote, 'I have quite lost my heart to Kennington. He has the most extraordinary personal magnetism of anyone I have ever met – a great man I think. Certainly his sculpture of Lawrence is a masterpiece.'[100] Through Kennington, the lives of Lawrence and Hillary intertwined, reinforcing the association between constructions of heroism in the interwar period and the Second World War.

Kennington lent Hillary his copy of Lawrence's yet unpublished manuscript *The Mint*, which described his time in the ranks of the RAF as he struggled to live in the shadow of the legend that had grown up around him. Lawrence described his motivation to enlist as a 'a little wish to make myself a little more human ... by an itch to make myself ordinary in a mob of likes'.[101] This struck a chord with Hillary who claimed that *The Mint* 'helped me clear up something that had been worrying me for months. To fly again, or not.'[102] He believed that Lawrence had 'found amongst those

airmen and the ordinary things he shared with them ... some kind of fellowship and happiness which before had been denied him. As much as anything I came back for that.'[103] The wider tension between heroism and ordinariness played itself out within Hillary. Unable to adjust to the heroic character he had created, Lawrence's description of his search for companionship and ordinariness propelled Hillary back to active service. In November 1942, Hillary was passed by the medical board and returned to flying. On the 8 January 1943, he crashed while on a training exercise and died.

His death provided the tragic ending to make the legend complete. His obituary in the *Times* described Hillary as exemplifying 'the spirit and temper of the Royal Air Force, which in the unchartered fields of air fights with a valour Nelson would have recognised and Wellington saluted. "Captain of the Guard, summon the buglers all."'[104] Hillary, the reluctant, sceptical and anguished crusader, is located within a tradition of national military heroes. Writing just three months after his death, his friend Arthur Koestler commented:

> In times of war the dead recede quicker and myths form faster; already there is one growing around Hillary and it is easy to foresee that it will wax and expand, until his name was has become one of the symbolic names of this war. … For myths grow like crystals: there is some diffuse emotion latent in the social medium which strives for expression as the molecules in a saturated solution strive to find a coherent pattern; and as soon as a suitable core is found, they group themselves around it and the crystal is formed, the myth is born.[105]

Koestler recognized that myths could only form around the 'right type of hero', someone who encapsulated the 'diffuse emotion latent in the social medium'. Hillary, he felt, embodied, a certain social mood that strove for expression. His narrative from sceptic to crusader, spoke to the broader experience of a nation which once again found itself at war, so shortly after it had sworn 'never again'. For Koestler, Hilary symbolized 'the myth of the Lost Generation – sceptic crusaders, knights of effete veneer, sick with the nostalgia of something to fight for, which as yet is not. It is the myth of the crusade without a cross, and of desperate crusaders in search of a cross.'[106]

Conclusions

As Koestler identified, *The Last Enemy* articulated the complexities of the heroic character during the Second World War. Drawing upon modes established during the First World War, the airman was an amalgamation of traditional and modern notions of heroism. Despite their mastery of some of the most technologically sophisticated weapons of war, chivalric ideas of aerial combat remained resonant. Throughout the Second World War, pilots were cast as the 'knights of the air' and representations focused on their individual heroism. The heroic portraiture sought by Harald Peake and eventually amassed by the WAAC must be understood in this context. However, whereas the pilots of the First World War were neatly assimilated into ideas of chivalry, during the Second World War this characterization did not quite fit. Not only, as

Hillary stressed, had the First World War discredited romantic ideas of warfare, the idea of a heroic knightly elite was incongruous with the wider representation of the war which stressed egalitarianism and the civilian nature of its fighting forces. Moreover, many of the qualities previously attributed to the pilot were now classed as Germanic and more closely embodied the values the nation was presented as fighting against than those it was presented as fighting for. Propagandists attempted to create accord by crafting the idea of the ordinary hero, but this construction was unsuccessful as it bore little relation to the ways in which the public were accustomed to viewing the pilot. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that Clark, one of the key intellectuals who shaped the schema of wartime propaganda, should advocate the ordinariness of Dring's subjects over the exaggerated heroism he perceived in Kennington's portraits. The disagreement between Clark and Peake therefore reflected a broader tension between established modes of heroic representation and the propagandist portrayal of the Second World War.

Kennington's portraits captured the complex nature of the heroic character during the Second World War. His pilots were both ordinary and extraordinary. Some exuded a gentle temperate masculinity while others erred towards the hyper-masculine. Although Kennington meticulously recorded the individual details of each sitter, his distinctive style and vision imbued all with a common characteristic. Their heroic qualities shine vividly through Kennington's boldly coloured pastels, yet closer inspection reveals the pilots' bodily and psychological fragility in the face of modern mechanical warfare. Although his work was popular, Kennington's failure, at times, to successfully balance these contradictory qualities was problematic and provoked criticism of his work from the press, the public and Clark.

Hillary became the archetypal hero of the Second World War because the character he created provided a medium through which these contradictory qualities could coalesce. His legend has proved enduring. Hillary has been the subject of numerous studies, while *The Last Enemy* itself has been continually republished since it was first released.[107] Kennington's portrait has become an intrinsic component of the Hillary myth. In those studies that are illustrated, this image provides the primary visualization of Hillary; from the frontispiece of Dickson's early biography, to the front cover of Pimlico's 1997 edition of *The Last Enemy*. This association has arguably made the portrait of Hillary the most well-known of the Kennington's RAF pastels. It was not, however, part of the WAAC collection. In 1942 Kennington refused to continue working for the WAAC. He was disillusioned by the failure of the committee to exploit his art for propaganda.[108] Although his work was prominently used in the exhibitions, Kennington felt that the 'gallery shows to .01 per cent of the people and those not the right ones. Cheap, large publications with poets and prose writers would get to the mass of munitions workers and services on whom all depends.'[109] Throughout his career, Kennington had been concerned with creating accessible and intelligible works in a broadly modernist idiom that might be appreciated by the general public.[110] The more or less positive popular reaction to his RAF pastels suggests that he succeeded to some extent in this objective. Indeed, Mass Observation attributed the popularity of his work to the likeness between subject and image that made them accessible to all.[111]

Clark's dismissive attitude towards Kennington might have had more to do with their different views on the nature of art. While both Clark and Kennington wanted modern art to be viewed and enjoyed by a wider public, they had different opinions on what sort of art was suited to this task. Kennington believed that the artist ought to produce work that was comprehensible to all, while, as discussed in Chapter 1, Clark argued that one of the major problems with popular taste was that it only appreciated art that was realistic. He thought instead that the public ought to be educated to understand and enjoy other forms of art. For Clark, the artist whose work most befitted this task was Nash. *Battle of Britain* exemplifies why Clark though romantic art was particularly suited to the education of popular taste. The image itself is striking and visually appealing. Although rendered in an imaginative fashion, its components are easily decipherable and depict actual events. However, by compressing the key elements of the summer of 1940 into a single picture frame, the painting invites reflection on its symbolic qualities, the larger values that were, for Nash, at stake in the war. *Battle of Britain* therefore simultaneously fulfilled Clarks's broader ambition to forge a new audience for modern art while conveying key propaganda themes. The image emphasized that the defence of Britain rested upon more than the shoulders of a few heroic men: barrage balloons guard the cities, while fighter planes rise from the landscape to meet the enemy in the air. Remaining on the ground are scores of aircraft, indicating Britain's superiority in the air and the might of its industrial effort. The strength and depth of Britain's defences, as the next chapter will discuss, was a key theme in both the WAAC collection and the wider propagandist portrayal of the home front.

4

The Blitz

In their study of public opinion during the first months of war, Mass Observation noted that as 'well as the fact of the aeroplane, and perhaps even greater, is the fear of the aeroplane, that fantasy that floats around the aeroplane'.[1] So great was this fear that the coming of war was thought of in apocalyptic terms: 'It was mixed in people's minds with the end of the world, in the supernatural as well as in political events, and the ultimate chaos of the *Shape of Things to Come*.'[2] Such widespread fears were, as Mass Observation identified, closely interlinked with cultural representations. As the first part of this chapter traces, interwar British culture was saturated with nightmarish visions of aerial warfare, whether fictitious, as in the case of the film *Things to Come*, or the very real events unfolding in China or Spain. These representations gave form to people's fears, and when the first wartime siren sounded, large sections of the British public were quite understandably terrified at the prospect of being bombed.

This popular fear made the government somewhat anxious. Due to the nature of mass industrial warfare, Britain's war machine was totally reliant on its civilian population. The government feared that 'defeat might flow not from the collapse of armies on a conventional battlefield but from the breakdown of morale at home'.[3] For those planning the war, the greatest threat to public morale came from the air. Fears about the civilian response to bombardment predated the advent of aerial warfare. In a lecture in 1914, Colonel Jackson speculated that intense air raids were likely to incite 'such panic and riot' as to 'force the Home Government to accept an unfavourable peace'.[4] The reaction to air raids during the First World War and the incidence of shellshock in the trenches appeared to confirm predictions about the emotional vulnerability of civilians in modern warfare.[5] These assumptions underpinned the RAF's strategic thought. Trenchard, the Chief of the Air Staff, argued that in a future war the RAF must target enemy morale and 'trust to their people cracking before ours. ... That really was the final thing. The nation that would stand being bombed the longest would win in the end.'[6] Despite the lack of any real evidence for these claims, and contradictory evidence emerging out of Spain, in discussions and preparations for a future war, it continued to be assumed that raids would cause widespread neurosis and panic.[7] In 1938, a group of eminent psychiatrists warned the Ministry of Health that there would be three times as many psychological casualties as physical casualties and they should expect between three and four million cases of acute panic in the first six months of war.[8] The key objective of domestic propaganda was therefore to allay apprehension and prevent panic.

Throughout the war, propaganda attempted to manage emotional responses to air raids to try and prevent a critical breakdown in morale. The mass hysteria predicted failed to materialize and propagandists seized on the generally positive response to bombing to craft a narrative of the people unified and stoically defiant under fire. Good citizenship was equated with the ability to control and suppress fear. This emphasis on courage and stoicism engendered an emotional regime in which the expression of contrary emotions or experiences, such as fear, was difficult. This chapter focuses on three experiences that were difficult to express within the framework of wartime propaganda: the destruction of home, civilian death and the feeling of fear. By considering how war artists depicted these submerged narratives of wartime life, this chapter interrogates the relationship between art, propaganda and the experience of living through the Blitz.

The shadow of the bomber

The 1937 Paris International Exposition was intended to be a celebration of the wonders of the modern world; however, the inclusion of Picasso's *Guernica* (Figure 4.1) ensured that the darker and destructive aspects of technological advancement were also acknowledged. The painting memorialized the bombing of Guernica, an attack infamous for the deliberate destruction of an undefended civilian town. The painting is a powerful statement of the horrors faced by civilians in modern warfare. The frame is filled with screaming and tormented faces. A dead warrior clutching a broken dagger sprawls across the foreground, unable to defend the nation from this new and most horrific form of warfare. On the left, a woman screams in agony as flames lap around her body; on the right, a woman throws up her head in grief, clutching a dead child to her chest. Even today, after a century of so much violence, the image retains its power to evoke the suffering of civilians in war. A copy hangs in the United Nations

Figure 4.1 Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937. Courtesy of Photographic Archives Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia.

building as a reminder of the human cost of war. When, in 2003, Colin Powell and John Negroponte gave a press conference arguing for military action in Iraq, a blue curtain was draped over the image, for fear of sending out 'mixed messages' as they made their case for war. Outside, protestors waved reproductions of *Guernica*, testament to the enduring resonance of Picasso's representation of one of the most infamous air raids of the Spanish Civil War.

The devastating attack on Guernica quickly became a global symbol of the indiscriminate brutality of the bomber. In his eyewitness account, journalist George Steer framed the raid as signalling the advent of a new era in warfare in which civilians are the object of attack: 'The raid on Guernica is unparalleled in military history. Guernica was not a military objective. … The object of the bombardment was seemingly the demoralization of the civil population and the destruction of the cradle of the Basque race.'[9] Steers's report was syndicated in *The Times*, *The New York Times* and *L'Humanité*, where Picasso learnt of the attack and was inspired to begin work on his monumental painting. The monotone palette employed and the newsprint pattern on the horse remind us that this was not an event Picasso witnessed first-hand, but via its repeated representation in the mass media. As Stephen Spender noted contemporaneously:

> It is not a picture of horror which Picasso has seen and been through himself. It is the picture of a horror reported in newspapers, of which he has read accounts and perhaps seen photographs. This kind of second-hand experience, from the newspapers, the news-reels, the wireless, is one of the dominating realities of our time. The many people who are not in direct contact with the disasters falling on civilisation live in waking-nightmare of second-hand experiences which in a way are more terrible than real experiences because the person overtaken by a disaster has at least a more limited vision than the camera's wide, cold, recording eye, and at least has no opportunity to imagine horrors worse than what he is seeing and experiencing.[10]

During the interwar years, terrifying images of air raids percolated everyday life. In the morning papers over breakfast and in the newsreels at the cinema, the British witnessed the advancing capabilities of the bomber in China, Abyssinia and Spain, and feared they might be next. Images of the imagined air war were propagated for a range of reasons. The spectre was mobilized by those campaigning for disarmament but also by those calling for rearmament. Later in the decade, graphic imagery of the bombing of Spain was used by groups urging for intervention. Others simply harnessed the frisson of fear in film and fiction for entertainment and profit. Despite the different meanings imbued in these visions, the form that they took was remarkably consistent.

It was imagined that any future war would begin with an attempt at a 'knock-out blow', a sudden attack so devastating that it would make the continuing prosecution of the war impossible. On Armistice eve 1932, in an emotive speech calling for disarmament, Stanley Baldwin warned that towns faced being bombed in the first five minutes of war and that there was little that could be done to defend the nation: 'the bomber will always get through'.[11] Baldwin's doom-laden prophesy was so frequently

alluded to in the 1930s that Ian Patterson describes it as 'a mantra' of the decade.[12] It spoke to long-held anxieties about the challenge posed by aviation to the way in which the national space was imagined. When, in 1906, the first European flight of over 100m by Santos-Dumont was consigned to a four-line paragraph in the News-in-brief section of the *Daily Mail*, proprietor, Lord Northcliffe, was furious: 'Don't you realize that England is no longer an island?' he commented. 'Let me tell you, there will be no more sleeping behind the wooden walls of old England with the Channel as our safety moat. This means aerial chariots of a foe will descend on British soil if war comes!'[13] Advancing technological development, accelerated by the First World War, meant that it was less than a decade before Britain was attacked from the air, first by Zeppelin airships and later, in 1917, by Gotha bombers.[14] Although the casualties and damage inflicted by these raids was relatively minor, they were invested with great significance.[15] In the 1938 Penguin Special, *The Air Defence of Britain*, Air-Commodore Charlton asserted that these raids 'should rank with us, and will in the eyes of posterity, as the marking of an epoch'.[16]

Charlton noted that thanks to the nation's geography, Britain had been spared the 'unending conflict' from which the continent 'seldom had a respite'. This was meaningless in the air age: 'at one fell swoop the barriers are lowered, the walls are breached, the rivers crossed and the mountains overtopped'.[17] Charlton argued that the geographical ordering of the nation made Britain particularly vulnerable to air attack: 'If it had been done deliberately, we could not as a nation have produced a social pattern, and a set economy, more favorable for aggression from the air. … We are laid out, as if on an operating-table, for the surgical methods of the bomber.'[18] In the air age, ideas of the nation based upon Britain's island status and territorial impregnability were moribund. Far from being immune to attack and invasion, Britain was positioned as particularly vulnerable to the bomber.

Representations of air raids focused on the destruction of homes, evoking 'the domestication of war'.[19] The aeroplane rendered the distinction between home and fighting fronts obsolete; civilians and their homes were now the object of enemy attack. This new vulnerability of home coincided with a period in which great investments were made in the idea of home. In the years that witnessed the spread of suburban home ownership and the growth of a whole industry to cater for people's aspirations for an ideal home, Alison Light traced the development of 'an Englishness at once more inward-looking, more domestic and more private'. Home, she suggests, became 'a new locus for the idea of a continuous and stable national history'.[20] The aeroplane, however, threatened to bring war to suburbia. Campaigners were quick to harness the emotive power of this fear. A pamphlet produced in 1934 by the 'Hands off Britain Air Defence League', a right-wing group who called for rapid air rearmament, sought to awaken the public to the threat of aerial warfare with an image of a suburban London house destroyed by a single bomb in the First World War.[21] While this group hoped that these images would engender support for their plan the create a 'winged army of long-range British bombers to smash the foreign hornets in their nests', very similar imagery appeared in *Covenants with Death*, a book produced by the *Daily Express* in 1934 that conveyed a pacifist message. In an image entitled an 'Englishman's Home', we are shown a bombed suburban house. The view to the fireplace, the symbolic heart of

the home, is obscured by rubble. On top of the mantelpiece are the shattered remains of ornaments, testament to the pride and care that was previously expended on this space, before it was destroyed in an instance by a single bomb.

Women and children, as Sue Grayzel has highlighted, were represented as the primary victims of air attack to emphasize the indiscriminate nature of this form of warfare.[22] Images of children killed in air raids were reproduced by those calling for intervention in Spain. A selection was published in the *Daily Worker* in 1936. It justified the publication of such a graphic article in the hope that it might 'shock all those who look at them into realising that these dead children are the cost of brutal, militaristic aggression against peaceful people'. It juxtaposed dead Spanish children with an image of an English girl playing. The headline read 'Twelve days ago THEY played as SHE does'. The caption beneath warned that 'fascist aggression, unchecked, carries its threat of death for our children too'.[23] In Three Guineas, Virginia Woolf recalled the powerful emotive effect such images had: 'Those photographs are not an argument; they are simply a crude statement of fact addressed to the eye. … War is an abomination; a barbarity; war must be stopped.'[24] The corpses of children made a powerful moral case for intervention against a force, which, if not stopped, threatened to bring this new and most dreadful form of warfare to the streets and homes of Britain.

The 1936 film *Things to Come* encapsulated the image of the air raid that haunted interwar popular culture. Set in 'Everytown', the film juxtaposed the domestic with war. It opens with Christmas shoppers hurrying about the city in festive mood, while ominous headlines in the background pronounce 'the world is on the brink of war'. We learn of the outbreak of war during a family Christmas celebration in the suburbs and see the searchlights grope in the sky for the expected invader. The outbreak of war is rapidly followed by a devastating air strike – the knockout blow. The bombers travel unimpeded towards the capital; there is no defence. On the streets previously populated by Christmas shoppers, panic ensues as people rush for shelter and gas masks. Next, a frantic montage of explosions and flying rubble. Modern leisure spaces such as the cinema and the department store collapse as the bombs fall. The film lingers on the destruction: Everytown is in ruins; dead bodies lie intertwined. The sequence climaxed with a shot of a child buried in the rubble.

Things to Come had a profound impact on the popular imagination. Edward Blishen recalled that before the outbreak of war he had a distinct vision

> built up from reality partly – from Guernica – but also from the film of H. G. Wells's *Shape of Things to Come*. We all knew what war would be, the moment it was declared: the fleets, the endless fleets of bombers throbbing through our skies, the cities exploding, the instant anarchy. Life would become an instant horror film.[25]

For a moment it appeared that life would imitate art. As in *Things to Come* the declaration of war was followed by the wail of the air raid siren. This caused widespread alarm and confusion.[26] Novelist George Beardmore wrote in his diary that it 'would be impossible to convey the sense of utter panic with which we heard the first Air Raid warning, ten minutes after the outbreak of war. We had all taken *The Shape of Things to*

Come too much to heart.'[27] This first siren was, however, the point that fact and fiction began to diverge. This was a false alarm and it would be almost a year before British cities faced a sustained bombing campaign. In the meantime, the artists of the WAAC were recruited into the wider propagandist project to dispel the idea that had defined representations of air raids in the 1930s: the bomber will always get through.

Britain defended

The first propaganda film of the war, *The Lion Has Wings*, sought to reassure audiences of the capabilities of Britain's air defence system.[28] A dramatized sequence showcased each element of Britain's defensive system repelling successive waves of bombers. Spitfires engage the first wave and shoot two German bombers out of the sky. The next is caught in the beam of a searchlight and taken down by AA gunfire. The final squadron of bombers makes it to London, but upon seeing the barrage balloons, a look of pure fear spreads over the crew's faces as they try to rapidly climb out of the balloon's reach. With a shake of a head they decide to turn back but are caught by British fighters shortly after they reach the sea and another four 'bandits' are shot down. In the film, three waves of bombers are repelled without a single British casualty. Mass Observation recorded that although many found this sequence rather unbelievable, others were reassured and felt safer.[29] Surveying Londoners in the autumn of 1939, the organization found that 'there is a quite unreasonable degree of confidence in the defences of London'. One woman from Kilburn, for example, stated she didn't want to be evacuated because 'they look after us so well here, the balloons and that, they'll never get through'.[30]

The defence of Britain was a prominent theme in the pictures collected by the WAAC during the phoney war. John Piper was commissioned to record ARP activity and was taken in great secrecy to see the headquarters in Bristol (Figure 4.2). Piper depicted a subterranean space, detached and protected from the frantic battles that threaten to rage overhead.[31] Humans do not inhabit this mechanistic place. The geometric forms, the harsh electric lighting and attention to technological detailing created a modern, if somewhat eerie and sterile, space. There is a real sense of tension in the scene, capturing the mood of the phoney war, the anticipation of the attack that will test the war worthiness of this facility. It suggested that the most advanced resources of the state were being harnessed to create a sophisticated and highly organized infrastructure, ready and capable to co-ordinate the defence of Britain

A very different image of an ARP control room emerged from Anthony Gross's 1940 commission (Figure 4.3). While Piper's is sterile, ordered and tensely empty, Gross's control room is a hive of human activity. His use of line suggests movement and energy, creating a busy, almost frantic centre. The control room is manned by women who are crowded in what appears to be a makeshift space. The papers piled on desks and pinned to posts add to this sense of chaos, which arguably reflected the more ad hoc reality of the service.[32] There are some similarities between Piper's and Gross's control rooms. It is also a protected subterranean place. The heavy beams on the ceiling suggest that work can continue through the raid. The functionality of the space is emphasized by the exaggerated scale of the row of telephones,

Figure 4.2 John Piper, *The Passage to the Control Room at SW Regional Headquarters*, Bristol 1940. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

highlighting the room as communications hub. Combined with the prominence given to the electric lighting, despite the chaos, the room is projected as a modern and technological place, fit for purpose – the defence of Britain.[33]

Above ground Britain's defences were represented as formidable. Nevinson depicted the British countryside transformed into a battlefield (Figure 4.4). The size and scale of the anti-aircraft guns is emphasized by the barrel stretching diagonally across the frame, its reach extending as far as the search lights that cross the sky. The guns in the distance dwarf the trees and the soldiers who man the weapons. It suggests that the full might of Britain's military machine was dedicated to the defence of the nation. Like

Figure 4.3 Anthony Gross, *An ARP Control Room in Southwark*, 1940. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

The Lion Has Wings, war art produced during the phoney war showcased the measures that had been put in place to protect the nation from the bomber. Britain's defensive systems were shown to be co-ordinated, technologically sophisticated and formidable, ready and able to repel the expected aerial attack. Such representations were in marked contrast to the invincible bomber portrayed in the 1930s. To what extent was this representational shift simply a propagandist strategy to reassure the public?

Uri Bialer argues that in the interwar period 'there seems to have been little to distinguish between the professional analysis of the impact of air attack in a future war and its portrayal in contemporary science fiction'. Throughout the 1930s, in the minds of British policy makers, there was 'a pervasive fear of a knock-out blow by aerial bombardment which, on the evidence of the records, might not unreasonably be described as an obsession'.[34] This was fuelled by the alarming speculation of the Air Ministry. In 1924, the Air Staff estimated that there would be fifty casualties for each ton of explosives dropped. Although this figure was based on a very dubious process of calculations, it was rarely questioned.[35] The Air Ministry speculated that given the technological developments in the interwar period, the weight of bombs dropped and the accuracy with which they could be targeted would be greatly increased and this led to some truly alarming prophesies. The Joint Planning Committee's report of 1936 warned that in a future war Germany would concentrate its air offensive against Britain and aim for a knockout blow. Air Staff estimated that casualties in London alone would be in the order of 20,000 in the first day, rising within a week to 150,000.[36]

The prevailing orthodoxy within the RAF was that there was little one could do to defend the nation against such an attack.[37] Trenchard, the Chief of the Air Staff, argued that it was pointless to waste resources on such an endeavour: it was 'best to have less fighters and more bombers to bomb the enemy and trust to their cracking before ours'. This belief shaped the nature of the Home Defence Force, announced in June 1923,

Figure 4.4 Christopher R. W. Nevinson, *Anti-aircraft Defences*, 1940. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

which was to consist of seventeen squadrons of fighters and thirty-five of bombers.[38] The Joint Planning Committee in 1936 admitted that it was unable 'to discover any method of direct defence sufficiently effective to guarantee the security of objectives in this country' and concluded that 'the only real answer lies in a counter-offensive'.[39]

This belief in the primacy of the bomber reflected the technological realities of the period. In the years between the armistice and the mid-1930s, the pace of bomber technology outstripped developments in defence systems. The speed of the bomber had doubled since 1918 and was able to fly at greater altitudes. This meant there was only a small window between the coast and London in which to engage the bomber in combat. Although various forms of early detection had been experimented with, no reliable solution had been found when Baldwin pronounced in 1932 that the 'bomber will always get through'.[40] As war approached, viable defensive technologies were developed. The capabilities of fighter planes were greatly enhanced by the introduction

of fast metal skinned low-wing cantilever monoplanes, such as the Spitfire.[41] They were equipped with effective, reliable and light ground to air radios. Radio communication enabled the more efficient and flexible use of resources, to direct the planes towards the incoming enemy. This process was greatly aided by the invention of radar. Developed in the mid-1930s, the radar chains only became operational in the spring of 1939. Collectively these technological developments provided the critical prerequisites in the shift towards a defensive strategy.

This shift did not originate from the military but from the intervention of Sir Thomas Inskip, Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence. In his report of 1937, Inskip argued that Britain's best chance for victory rested upon the nation's ability to withstand an initial attack so that the resources of the Empire might be mobilized to secure victory in a longer war of attrition. The report stated that 'the greatest danger against which we have to provide protection is attack from the air on the United Kingdom, designed to inflict a knock-out blow at the initial stage of war, and that our first endeavour must be to provide adequate defence against this threat'.[42] Drawing on evidence from the Spanish Civil War, which suggested a combination of fighters, anti-aircraft guns and searchlights could be effective in the defence of a city, Inskip challenged the dominant RAF view that the only defence was in offence and called for resources to be concentrated on the defence of Britain.[43]

Not only did this decision mean that the production of fighter planes was prioritized over bombers, it also injected a greater urgency into the various civil defence schemes. Following the publication of the Inskip report, a review of civil defence provisions was conducted by Warren Fisher. He was alarmed at the limited measures in place, particularly in comparison with Germany, and stressed the danger that air raids posed to the war effort, warning that 'the national will to resist might be broken, if the situation in the devastated areas could not be got under control at once'. He argued that civil defence must be improved and, significantly, defined the primary purpose of such provisions to be the maintenance of morale.[44] Morale was again emphasized when the Air Raid Precautions Bill was debated in parliament in November 1937. The home secretary underlined that the main purpose of the bill's provisions was 'to ensure the country against panic'. During the First World War, the government was criticized for failing to do enough to protect its citizens from air raids. As war began to look increasingly likely, there were widespread calls that the government should do more to defend the population. Even though very few measures had been put in place, the government sought to draw attention to its nascent ARP provisions to steady morale and give the impression that it was doing something to fulfil its duty to protect the people.[45] By the time war came, technological advances had made defence a more viable proposition, nevertheless, the continual representation of the nation's defences in the first months of war was intended to shore up morale as the nation awaited the long expected attack.

The representation of the Blitz

As the bombs began to fall, propagandists crafted an exemplary image of Britons under fire. Writing soon after the outbreak of war, Dr Maurice Wright advised the government

that to minimize psychological casualties, the 'civilian population must be treated as if they were combatant troops'.[46] Drawing on modes of representation established in the First World War, propagandists compared civilians to soldiers and imbued them with military virtues such as courage, camaraderie, discipline and heroism.[47] Most of all, the British were exhorted to behave stoically. As the MOI's first but controversial poster informed citizens, 'Your courage, your cheerfulness, your resolution will bring us victory.'[48] Such constructions continued to be propagated as the bombs began to fall in September 1940. *London Can Take It* was filmed at the beginning of the Blitz. In common with other early official films, it was an example of fairly overt propaganda that lacked the subtlety later films acquired. It was intended primarily to be distributed in America but was cut and released in British cinemas as *Britain Can Take It* where it proved popular.[49] The 'neutral' reporter assured the viewer that, despite the devastation and disruption London has incurred, he has seen 'no panic, no fear, no despair in London town. There is nothing but determination, confidence and high courage among the people of Churchill's island.' In the aftermath of the raid, London, we are told, gets up to fight again: 'London looks upwards toward the dawn and faces the new day with calmness and confidence.' Morale has not been dented; to the contrary, 'today the morale of the people is higher than ever before. They are fused together not by fear but by a surging spirit of courage the like of which the world has never known.' Unlike the representation of aerial bombardment in the 1930s, the civilian reaction to the air raid is characterized by calm resolve and not panic. We see Londoners patiently queuing to enter an air raid shelter. Above a poster reads: 'Carry on London and keep your chin up!' The narrator tells us that 'this is not a pleasant way to spend the night, but the people accept it as their part in the defence of London. These civilians are good soldiers.'

The WAAC's 1942 *Blitz* edition of *War Pictures by British Artists* placed itself within this paradigm. In a rousing introduction, J. B. Morton repeatedly alluded to the civilian as soldier. In these 'new' forms of war pictures, a 'new type of warrior' is evident. Morton comments that although the book contains no explicitly military scenes, 'no soldierly quality evident in battle-pictures to which we are accustomed is absent from these pictures. Here are courage, loyalty, devotion, self-sacrifice, discipline, endurance, in the garments of everyday life.' Under bombardment, the British people adapted to

> live like soldiers under fire. Rationed and disciplined, obeying, like soldiers, orders which sometimes seemed to them unnecessary and ridiculous, many of them thus hardened themselves and trained themselves to obey even that final order which demands the offering of one's life.

Although perhaps too close to register the magnitude of their deeds, posterity, Morton hopes, will recognize their 'epic stature'. He concludes, 'There can be no doubt that the hero, even when he is not in the picture, is Tom, Dick or Harry, and the heroine his wife.'[50]

Morton distanced war art from propaganda. The artists' task, he maintained, was 'to report faithfully the facts of a new and terrible warfare. … The pictures are a record of what England has had to endure. They tell, always sincerely, and almost without exaggeration, strange and stirring tales.'[51] Despite this insistence on record over propaganda, the

images included in the book broadly accorded with other state representations of the air raid. Edward Ardizzone's images, for example, embodied the idea of the stoic nation enduring the raids: boredom and an uncomfortable night's sleep appear the worst fate that awaits his shelterers. The Minister of Health was not, however, satisfied with his images, finding them 'depressing'. He suggested that Clark might send artists to more lively shelters in order that more 'cheerful' images might be produced.[52] Feliks Topolski's *The Warehouse Shelter in Commercial Road, East End* was certainly cheerful. It showed shelterers dancing, depicting the notion of camaraderie fostered under fire. When Mass Observation visited the Tilbury Shelter featured in this image, they saw little evidence of dancing or any form of social activity. Most shelterers were recorded as sleeping or doing nothing. Rather than camaraderie, Tilbury had a reputation for violent fights and unsanitary conditions. The shelter housed as many as 16,000 people each night and had just 2 toilets. So bad were conditions, that Tilbury was used to spearhead the campaign for public shelter improvements.[53] Although this was an extreme example, conditions in public shelters were far from pleasant. They had been planned on the expectation that raids would be brief and take place during the day. Shelters were often damp and uncomfortable, with little or no provision for sanitation. Several of the images collected by the WAAC alluded to this squalor. Henry Moore's *Tilbury Shelter Scene* (Figure 4.5) is decidedly different in tone to Topolski's painting. Moore recorded his impressions of this shelter: 'Dramatic, dismal lit, masses of reclining figures fading to perspective

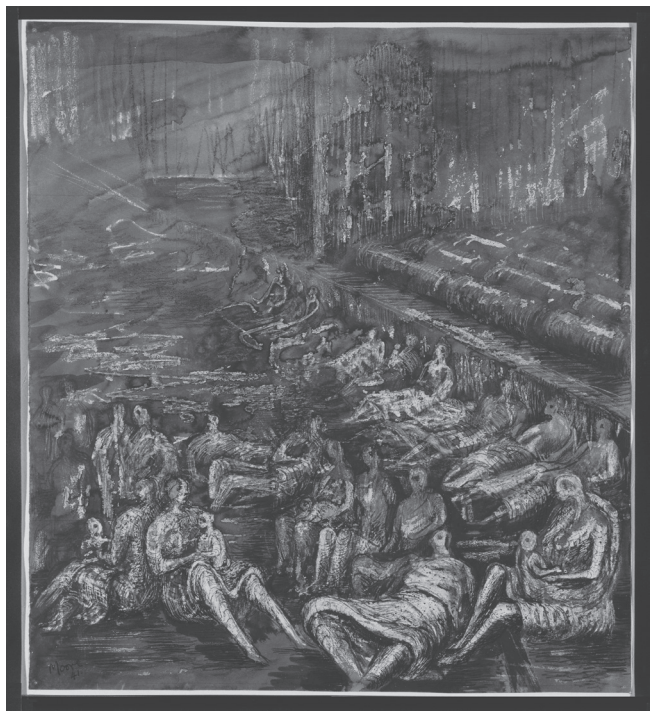

Figure 4.5 Henry Moore, *Tilbury Shelter Scene*, 1941. Courtesy of the Tate.

point – Scribbles and scratches, chaotic foreground. Dark wet settings'.[54] He conveyed this visually through the dark and dank tones; pools of greenish liquid encroach on the shelterers crowded together, sleeping or staring vacantly.

Moore's image is far more typical of the WAAC's coverage of shelters than Topolski's and the committee appear to have largely ignored the Minister of Health's request for cheerfulness. Nevertheless, strong accord can still be detected between war art and the propagandist portrayal of the Blitz. This is particularly true regarding the exclusive focus on public shelters. While such images have shaped the popular memory of the Blitz, the first shelter census of November 1940 suggested this was a minority experience. In the central area of London only 9 per cent slept in public shelters and just 4 per cent sought refuge in the tube. In the suburbs these figures were considerably lower.[55] Surveying people's shelter preferences, Mass Observation found that most favoured small private shelters and were reluctant to use communal shelters.[56] This was a subject that people felt strongly about and often expressed disgust at the conditions in public shelters and hostility towards those who frequented them, who were described as shirkers, low-sorts, foreigners or Jews.[57] One woman commented that 'they're filthy, dirty, breathing each other's air all the night. I think they're a disgrace to the British Empire. Also the people in them. The women only go so they won't have to cook dinner'.[58] They were certainly not regarded as suitable places for young men and the *Daily Express* ran a poster campaign to shame men out of using the tube.[59]

Access to public shelters was of course somewhat easier for artists and the sight of a great mass of people sheltering was aesthetically exciting. However, the focus on these public spaces allowed the construction of the idea that air raids had shattered the traditional British reserve and ushered in an unprecedented degree of communality – a key component of wartime propaganda. This idea was exemplified in the MOI's film *Ordinary People* (1941). Structured around the inhabitants of an eighty-person shelter, the film projected that through humour and many cups of tea, the neighbourhood carried on among the destruction. The shared intimacy of the shelter was demonstrated to foster community; suburban neighbours who were previously strangers pulled together in defiance of the raids. A similar idea was conveyed in Henry Moore's wartime work.

In Moore's tube shelter drawings, as in representations of the air raid from the 1930s, women and children featured strongly. While they are not dead, grieving or fleeing in panic, there was continuity in their deployment. Women and children remained signifiers of the domestic and embodied the incursion of war into the home. Moore's images expressed the dislocation of war. Home, the locus for ideas of the nation in the interwar period, has retreated into a dank, squalid, subterranean world. The images alluded to the way home was reconstituted during the war. While sketching in the tube, Moore observed 'people who were obviously strangers to one another forming tight little intimate groups'.[60] In *Grey Tube Shelter* (Figure 4.6), the individuals are posed as in a family portrait, suggesting the conception of the national community as a family, a trope frequently alluded to in wartime propaganda. Churchill spoke of the nation as 'united like one great family', while for Priestly the citizens of the nation gave each other courage and hope, 'like members of a sensible, affectionate family'.[61] The family unit, so disrupted by wartime mobilization, was reconstituted as the nation. In Moore's image, the people lack defining features, and their individual identities are subsumed

Figure 4.6 Henry Moore, *Grey Tube Shelter*, 1940. Courtesy of the Tate.

beneath the identity of the group. The figures are draped over each other, limbs entwine, boundaries between one body and the next blur. The nation here appears literally fused together. Moore therefore simultaneously portrayed the disruption to the domestic caused by bombing, while reconstituting the family as the nation and expressing the idea of national unity fostered in adversity.

In war art more generally, the private rituals of home are performed in these new public spaces, knitting, reading, game playing, Christmas celebrations and, most ubiquitously, sleep itself.[62] *Picture Post* noted the way bombing had acted to blur the division between the public and the private. An article published in October 1940, entitled 'Shelter Life', imagined the impression a Martian would get if he visited London. It was illustrated with pictures of people performing domestic rituals in public shelters: a woman doing her make up; an elderly man reading in bed; card games; hair brushing; eating and sleeping. A caption stated that 'here all one's life is public. Privacy, so highly cherished by Britons, is gone. Family life at evening has vanished. Here nothing is intimate. One talks, eats, sleeps, lives, with a hundred, a thousand others.' Through this ordeal, however, the admirable qualities of the nation are revealed: 'patience, cheerfulness, resignation, friendship, even gaiety, and, most of all, helpfulness'.[63] These representations suggest that as in the 1930s, home remained central to wartime ideas of the nation. Citing the examples of the BBC Home Service, the Home Guard and the Home Front, Antonia Lant has noted that during the war '"home" is virtually interchangeable with the word "national"'.[64] Even though the physical space of home was greatly disturbed and even destroyed by war, we can detect the transference of the associations and rituals of home from the private to the public and the idea of family extended to encompass the nation itself. While during the 1930s the association of home and nation was harnessed to emphasize the grave threat aerial warfare posed

to Britain, during the war it was used as a symbol of a unified national resistance, endurance, adaptation and survival.

As this chapter has illustrated, there was close accord between the WAAC's representation of air raids and its broader portrayal in propaganda. Did this mean that the WAAC failed in its ambition to record the experience of living through the Blitz? It is misleading to view wartime propaganda and experience as mutually exclusive. Propaganda had to bear some relationship to experience if it was to be convincing. As Helen de Mouliped, deputy head of the MOI's non-theatrical film programming, recalled, 'Films got very short shrift if they touched any area of people's experience and did not ring true.'[65] As James Chapman has argued, propaganda

> involved much more than simply the downward transmission of an official ideology ... [it] was as much responding to the mood of the country as it was trying to determine it. … The images of the British at war presented through the cinema were a powerful and dramatic means of constructing the people as united in their common struggle, but in the last analysis those images were perhaps just a heightened version of reality.[66]

There is much evidence that suggests that sentiments such as stoicism, communality and generally good morale were often found in blitzed cities.[67] In the middle of filming *London Can Take It,* director Humphrey Jennings, wrote to his wife who had sought sanctuary in the States. He spoke of the effect the Blitz had had on the people; 'what warmth, what courage' he exclaimed. The morale of the people, is unbroken, the nation united by a 'red flame of love and comradeship which cannot be defeated'. In a line seemingly paraphrased from the narration of the film, he wrote 'by the time you get this one or two more … churches will be smashed up … some civilians killed … but it all means nothing: a curious kind of unselfishness is developing which can stand all that and any amount more'.[68] While he might have been trying to reassure his wife, Jennings's account of London life during the Blitz is corroborated by Mass Observation. There are many positive reports on the atmosphere inside public shelters. The mood is characterized as calm and even cheerful. Conversations overheard tend to be humorous and there is much bravado. In the Ealing Broadway shelter, for example, noting the jovial atmosphere one man laughed and defiantly pronounced, 'Look at terrified Britain!'[69] Even after a particularly heavy raid on Stepney, it was noted that 'morale remained high: Everyone saying "He's not done himself any good. He thinks he can break the morale of the British people – but he'll never do that"'.[70] Propagandists seized upon these positive responses to the Blitz and wove them into a national narrative of heroic resistance.

The tone of propaganda was fine tuned in response to the reception of previous campaigns and the shifting national mood. A BBC broadcast on the aftermath of the bombing of Swansea was criticized by both the residents of the town and the MOI. In the broadcast, the narrator testified that

> there are the usual smiles; even those who have lost friends and relatives are not really depressed and their stories are told in a subdued manner but with a sense of pride. ... But the only effect on the spirit of the people has been to raise it higher

> than ever. ... I saw some elderly men and women running through the streets clutching small cases and parcels in their hands. These were all they had left in the world. Many of them raised their hand and gave us a cheery greeting.[71]

In response to this broadcast, the MOI produced a set of guidelines for journalists. They warned broadcasters that 'morale should never be over-played. The raid will have made many people feel frightened and far from "heroic"'. Generalizations about the state of morale should therefore be avoided and they stressed the complex range of emotions experienced in the aftermath of a raid, which might include 'cheerfulness, pride and excitement, but also shock, grief, loss and fear'. The document was rather vague on how these sorts of responses should be addressed, suggesting merely that the ordeal of the town should be placed in the context of the war as a whole: 'the raided town courageously endures its experiences in common with others: all make their contributions to the general war effort'.[72] Yet as the MOI had themselves identified, individual emotional responses were often at odds with the broader projection of a heroic and stoic nation united in defiance. How then did these aspects of experience find expression? The remainder of this chapter will focus on three such submerged narratives of blitz life: the loss of home, death and fear. These themes were central to the representation of the air raid in the 1930s but were problematic to express during wartime within the broader rubric of the state's presentation of blitzed Britain.

The destruction of home

Although no precise figures were recorded, it is estimated that two-seventh of Britain's total housing stock was either damaged or destroyed during the Second World War. In London, only 1 in 10 houses escaped damage and in particularly heavily bombed areas, such as Bermondsey, the figure was closer to 4 in every 100.[73] The physical destruction of home was therefore a common experience during the war. Many found this prospect highly distressing. One Mass Observer returned home to find his housekeeper upset. She explained: 'Isn't it terrible. All these people losing their homes, and you don't know where to go. I think it's absolutely terrible. There's two down just along the roads here, and another in Henderson Road.' The observer noted that this behaviour was unexpected:

> She is almost crying as she says all this ... . She is not normally a person to carry on emotionally, but very calm and placid … . She isn't any more than average frightened for herself, but … her whole life and almost everything she cares about apart from people centres round home. … She has often emphasised in conversations … how terrible it is for people to lose their homes, when reading about the wars in Spain or China or about the Jews in Germany. And in her imagination to lose one's home is one of the worst calamities that can ever happen.[74]

Preparations for war had focused on the physical and psychological casualties; very few measures were put in place to assist the homeless. In the initial period of the war, the process of rehousing was often chaotic and prolonged.[75] The representation of

domestic loss was therefore particularly problematic, given the deep distress it caused individuals and the failure of the state to provide for the homeless.

The MOI was particularly prescriptive about the way that domestic loss could be represented. Its censorship guidelines prohibited the publication of 'pictures of shattered houses unless showing an equal number of undamaged houses or illustrating the efficacy of a prepared shelter'.[76] In film, the chief censor instructed that each panning shot 'must start from an undamaged building and must conclude on an undamaged building and it must not linger over damaged buildings'.[77] In addition to these official regulations, artists themselves were reluctant to intrude upon these personal disasters.[78] There were therefore very few images of domestic destruction collected by the WAAC. Those that they did acquire often conformed to the strictures of censorship. Charles Bathurst's *An Interior – Canning Town* showed a bombed building sliced open to reveal its interior.[79] In this regards it is reminiscent of the images of domestic destruction that proliferated in the 1930s. Nevertheless, he has been careful to include a neighbouring house intact and the survival of the Anderson shelter among the rubble. There were some artists who did not conform to official guidelines. Clifford Hall was both an artist and a volunteer stretcher bearer. Through his work he encountered first-hand the trauma of destruction. In *Homeless*, three forlorn figures shuffle through a devastated neighbourhood in the rain. None of the houses featured are fit for habitation. This was a bleak representation of the human consequences of the government's failure to provide for those who had lost their homes. Nevertheless, this image was an exception and in the collection as a whole there are very few images of domestic destruction.

Although domestic buildings were destroyed in far greater numbers than public buildings, artists overwhelmingly focused on damage to historic buildings. Of the fifty images featured in the *Air Raids* edition of *War Pictures by British Artists*, twenty-two depict damage to historical buildings. The MOI was keen to promote the representation of such buildings on account of their propaganda value.[80] Such destruction, the MOI recommended, should be harnessed as evidence of the Luftwaffe's 'wanton and indiscriminate bombing of non-military objectives'. These were actions that 'civilised people do not do even in wartime' and tactics that the RAF would never consider.[81] The representation of bombed historic buildings therefore contributed to the projection of the war as a conflict between civilization and barbarism. Artists focused on buildings that embodied the values that Britain was fighting for. Felix Topolski depicted the Old Bailey; Pitchforth explored the ruins of parliament; and Henry Carr was one of many artists who chose to record the destruction of London's churches. Through the representation of destroyed historic buildings, the war artists presented the Blitz as an assault on British civilization; symbols of justice, democracy and Christianity recklessly destroyed by German 'vandalism'.[82]

Death

The destruction of life was an ever-present aspect of wartime life. Although there were far fewer casualties than had been predicted, approximately 60,000 civilians were killed over the course of the war.[83] Death, and the threat of death, became a much more

everyday experience, and Mass Observation respondents reported that the thought of death was never far from their minds, especially during air raids.[84] Virginia Woolf characterized the experience as 'lying in the dark and listening to the zoom of a hornet which may at any moment sting you to death'.[85] The public representation of death was however problematic.[86] Under the initial defence regulations, very little news about air raids was allowed to be released as it was feared that this would be useful to the enemy. Throughout the phoney war, the MOI urged that more details should be given to the press in order that public trust of official announcements be maintained and rumours prevented.[87] Although this led to greater disclosure regarding the locality of raids, the government stood firm on casualties. On the 3 July 1940, the War Cabinet ruled that precise numbers of casualties should not be released and must be referred to in general terms such as slight, considerable or heavy.[88] Despite lobbying from the MOI and the Air Ministry, who argued that the lack of news was causing rumours and having a deleterious effect on morale, the prime minister maintained his original position that the publication of precise figures would be demoralizing.[89]

The representation of death in popular culture, although ever present, was similarly oblique. Even in the most propagandist film, *London Can Take It*, death is constantly alluded to. The narrator tells us in a matter of fact way that London has been bombed every night for five weeks and will be bombed again tonight: 'They will be over tonight, and they will destroy a few buildings and kill a few people.' The camera shows a group of people at a bus stop and adds: 'probably a few people you are watching now'. However, in the context of the film, the presence of death functions to emphasize the heroism and endurance of ordinary British civilians. In the aftermath of the raid, there is no mention of casualties, but gravestones in a bombed church hint at the human cost of bombing. The theme of death is returned to later in the film. Five weeks of bombing are said to have inflicted 'death in its most ghastly garb'. The accompanying footage showed rescue workers sifting through wrecked buildings; however, it is not a dead body that is retrieved, but an unharmed cat. While dead bodies were a key motif in the images of air raids in Spain or China, they are absent from these wartime depictions. Although death is treated in a matter of fact way, it could not be directly confronted in visual form.

Many artists working for the WAAC addressed death in a similarly oblique fashion. For example, Leonard Rosoman recorded the moment before two of his fellow fire fighters were killed (Figure 4.7). The fate of the fire fighters is clear, as indicated by the force with which the falling wall strikes the house above their heads. The tension created by witnessing this scene, unable to avert the unfolding tragedy, makes this just as powerful, if not more, than the graphic images of corpses that proliferated during the 1930s. Corpses are almost entirely absent from the images amassed by the WAAC. One of the only images to feature dead bodies is Louis Duffy's 1940 *Aftermath* (Figure 4.8). The corpses here are intact and identifiable as adult males, in marked contrast to the gruesome images of children that proliferated during the 1930s. Their bodies lie next to an air raid shelter, which, despite being struck by debris, is fully intact: a lesson perhaps to take shelter. When published in the *Blitz* edition of *War Pictures by British Artists*, the painting was carefully contextualized within wider narratives of the war. The caption states: 'The civilian's

Figure 4.7 Leonard Rosoman, *A House Collapsing on Two Firemen*, Shoe Lane, London, EC4, 1940. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

part in totalitarian war. They are in the front line, they endure and they die, or they are rescued, and the survivors carry on.'[90]

More often, as Brian Foss argues, 'architectural damage acts as a visual surrogate for the unseen broken bodies of the former inhabitants, evoking rather than portraying the violation of the body'. This was exemplified by the twisted forms in Graham Sutherland's depiction of blitzed buildings.[91] Although Sutherland never portrayed death literally, it dominated his recollection of the scenes he witnessed, particularly in the East End:

> The raids began in the East End – in the Dock areas – and immediately the atmosphere became much more tragic. In the city one didn't think of the destruction of life. … But in the East End one did think of the hurt to people and there was every evidence of it.
>
> I don't know what I had expected but even a mattress that had been blown out of a house looked more like a body than a mattress. From the butcher's shops which had been hit the meat spewed on the road, and I remember feeling quite sick when seeing this for the first time because I thought that here was a body which hadn't been picked up.[92]

Figure 4.8 Louis Duffy, *Aftermath*, 1940. Courtesy of the Laing Art Gallery.

While Sutherland implied he saw evidence of death, in his writing he described these scenes through his encounters with objects evocative of corpses. A similar process is evident in his paintings. There is a marked difference between those images he painted of the city, and those he painted in the East End, where the toll on human life was ever present. In the city references to death were explicit (Figure 4.9). Here the girders reach upwards like a rib cage, while the fires that continue to rage suggest the form of a fallen body. While his images of the city are imbued with energy and movement, the scenes of the East End are deathly still and silent.

Devastation 1941 (Figure 4.10) depicts Silvertown, an area particularly hard hit due to its proximity to the docks. The tonal range is sombre. Forms in the street are suggestive of bodies. In *Wrecked Public House*, the ruins are transformed to evoke the dead human form. As in several of his images, the form resembles a crucifix – a point noted contemporaneously by Eric Newton.[93] This arguably mediates the death of so many civilians through traditional narratives of war and nation, by the evocation of sacrifice.

Figure 4.9 Graham Sutherland, *Devastation in the City: Twisted Girders against a Background of Fire*, 1941. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

Figure 4.10 Graham Sutherland, *Devastation, 1941: An East End Street*, 1941. Courtesy of the Tate.

Unlike Sutherland and Duffy's depictions of the loss of life, Clifford Hall's *But the Damage Was Slight and the Number of Casualties Very Small* (Figure 4.11) resisted incorporation into wider narratives of war and sacrifice. The title contrasted the vague language proscribed with the devastation on the scene. Hall shows us his work as a stretcher bearer extracting bodies from the ruins of a house. The recovery workers

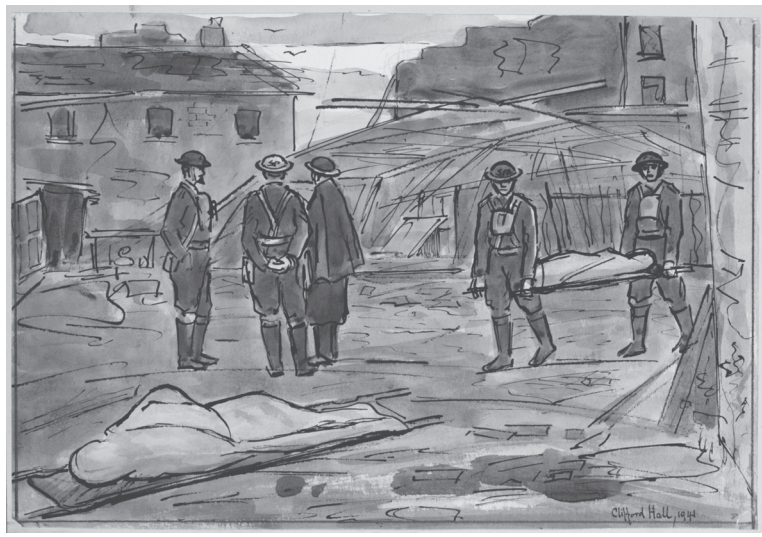

Figure 4.11 Clifford Hall, '… *But the Damage Was Slight and the Number of Casualties Very Small*', 1941. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

chatter subduedly as the corpses are laid out under sheets; this is an everyday occurrence for them. The image is mundane rather than heroic. It is a frank representation of the normality of death during the Blitz. Hall's painting was not typical of the WAAC's representation of death. In common with other forms of propaganda, civilian death is ever present in war art, reflecting its prominence in the experience of living through the Blitz. Nevertheless, it was difficult to address directly. Instead it had to be suggested obliquely or contained within wider narratives about war and sacrifice.

Fear

Of all the emotional responses to air raids, fear worried policy makers the most. They were greatly concerned that air raids might induce widespread panic, precipitating a collapse in morale and ultimately defeat. Following the Fall of France in June 1940, the MOI drafted a series of bulletins about fear. These stressed that 'Hitler's object is to spread panic so that we give up working and want to give up fighting'. It was the duty of every citizen to strive to combat their own fear in order to ensure the defeat of Hitler. 'You have got to beat him. Like soldiers you have got to train for the war which is being waged against you.' A programme of 'Mental ARP' was recommended, which included strategies such as socializing, lending a hand, keeping hands busy and, most importantly, disguising your fear from others.[94] These suggestions were echoed in a number of articles which appeared in the popular press. Writing in *The Listener*, Air Marshall Joubert instructed readers that 'your weapon is your resistance. … On your courage … your ability to resist fear … the future of this country depends.'[95] The *Picture*

Post psychologist argued that courage was the ability to control one's fears. Under no circumstances, he instructed, should you disturb others by showing your fear or let it interfere with your duties. The inability to control one's fears, he argued, was 'abnormal'.[96]

Articles such as these influenced the way people understood the emotional landscape of war. Writing at the beginning of September 1940, a woman from Maida Vale described how she perceived two distinct responses to air raids. People were either nervous and inclined to panic or what she termed 'casual' and fearless. As bombing continued, the differences had become more pronounced 'the casuals have become more casual than ever; the nervous … are on the whole getting more and more nervous'.[97] She of course counted herself among the casuals. Writing just a month later her perception of the situation had altered dramatically after reading an article in the *Daily Mirror*. In this article, the paper's psychologist argued that those who felt nervous at the prospect of attack were least likely to experience fear when danger comes. This, he explained, was because those sensitive to fear release more adrenalin which he claimed gave you 'courage to dare and energy to do and skill to perform. Dull, insensitive, stodgy people have adrenalin glands which work at only half-speed. Though these people are less sensitive to danger to begin with, they are the first to break down. … The boasters and the braggarts are often the first to give way and break under stress.'[98] Using language virtually identical to the article, the woman from Maida Vale explained her reassessment of the situation: 'a great many people of the stolid, unimaginative type, who were completely fearless … have been the ones to crack up worst and to become the most jittery and liable to panic … [those] who suffered the agonies of fright in anticipation, are the calmest and most fearless of all now that it has come to the pinch'. While before she described herself as a casual, she now positioned herself as an example of this second group, terrified initially but now fearless.[99] The article caused this woman to recompose her description of her emotional state so that it accorded with what the psychologist proscribed as the normative response to the situation.

However, an article of this type had a different effect on a man from New Maldon. He continued to experience intense fear and became 'extremely self critical as to my ability to maintain calmness – I remember an article I had read those who make the most fuss before a raid are usually calm during it. I wondered if the converse were true.'[100] Unlike the woman here, he cannot reconcile what he feels with what he has read is the correct emotional response. This discord made him anxious about his inability to control his fear. Similar anxieties were expressed by other respondents who felt that 'my nerves are not what they *should* be'.[101] Failure to conform to the image of the brave and stoic citizen caused both anxiety and shame. Those who openly displayed fear were seen as abnormal, branded, for example, as 'lunatics', 'neurotics', 'drunks' or 'foreigners'.[102] This was certainly not a climate in which it was easy to express fear. Many Mass Observers, however, described an underlying atmosphere of fear and tension. One suggested that 'there is probably a good deal of anxiety behind this "take-it-in-your-stride-joke-about-it" attitude, but it does not come to the surface'.[103] Discussing the mood after the bombing of Redhill another noted the general calmness but felt 'their calmness struck me as being deliberately dramatic'.[104] For the most part such fear and tension, although palpable, remained unsaid, lurking just beneath the surface.

There were moments when fear found expression. Sheltering in Notting Hill, one woman proclaimed defiantly, 'I'm terrified and I don't care who knows it.'[105] Another

described her first air raid as 'terrifying'. She and her mother were both 'frightened and held each other', drinking brandy to calm their nerves. Her mother chanted over and over 'love, love god is love'. Although she wished to be courageous, she confessed that she was still full of nerves during subsequent raids.[106] Public expressions of fear were more common after an area had been bombed.[107] After a raid in Mill Hill, it was observed that on hearing the siren nearly all ran for shelter and inside most were in a state of mild panic[108] In Queen's Road tube it was reported that a man had hysterics and started a panic and the situation was only brought under control after the police were called.[109] Panic was particularly noted in the more unexpected regional raids.[110] In the aftermath of one of the most infamous attacks of the war, a Mass Observer in Coventry recorded:

> There were more open signs of hysteria, terror, neurosis observed in one evening than during the whole of the past two months together in all areas. Women were seen to cry, to scream, to tremble all over, to faint in the street, to attack a fireman, and so on.[111]

In 1943, an air raid warning in Bethnal Green caused panic to surface with disastrous consequences. Startled by a nearby salvo of guns, people rushed down the steps of the narrow entrance of the tube station. A woman fell. A crush ensued as people continued to push their way in. One hundred and seventy-three people were killed. Herbert Morrison ordered that the details of the catastrophe should not be made public, particularly any mention that it was caused by panic as he feared the consequences for morale.[112] Such instances of panic were unusual, and the expected legions of psychological casualties predicted never materialized. Nevertheless, fear remained an important emotional response to the experience of bombing.

Representations of fear were however unusual. The experience is hinted at in the MOI film *Ordinary People* (1941). A couple are sharing their dinner with their neighbours, a mother and daughter, who have recently been bombed out. The meal is interrupted by the wailing of the siren and a tense silence descends on the room. The women look anxiously towards the sky; they tightly grip hands beneath the table. The wife breaks the silence and, with a reassuring smile, announces that it is time to go to the shelter. The husband's protestations about his meal being interrupted are cut short by a knowing look between the couple, acknowledging their neighbours' anxiety. This scene captured both the underlying tension in wartime Britain and the difficulty of openly expressing fear. Simultaneously it reinforced broader social codes about fear. First, it presented fear as exceptional. It is articulated by two women who have recently been through the trauma of the destruction of their home. Secondly, while fear is acknowledged it remains unspoken. Rather than allowing it to dwell, the tension is quickly dispelled by the friendly chatter of the neighbour. She is doing her bit as a wartime citizen, quelling the first signs of fear. The prevention of fear is thereby represented as a collective responsibility, further adding to an environment where it is difficult to express fear.

Artists working independently during the war were free to document fear and panic and produced images much like the representation of the air raid in the 1930s. For example, in Edward Burra's 1941 *Blue Baby, Blitz over Britain,* the aerial menace

is personified as a cartoon-like creature composed of aircraft parts.[113] Its massive form fills the sky, rendering the people below tiny and defenceless in the face of the terrifying power of military technology. The population cower in fear, fleeing in panic to what little shelter the ruins afford. Artists working for the WAAC could only express fear within certain parameters.

Carel Weight's painting *It Happened to Us* was felt to fall outside of these parameters. Weight had been travelling on a trolley bus when a raid started. Looking up he saw a Messerschmitt fighter which appeared to be heading straight for the bus. Panic descended as the passengers attempted to flee all at once through the narrow doors.[114] The painting he submitted was rejected by the committee on account of the explicit acknowledgement of panic.[115] Weight was directed instead to depict panic obliquely through the flight of zebras from a zoo.

Charles Murray also eschewed a direct representation of an air raid to hint at the fear associated with aerial bombardment. *Building a Bomber Aircraft* (Figure 4.12) appeared in the production issue of the 1943 series of *War Pictures by British Artists*. It is quite different to other images of production discussed in Chapter 2. While the figures that inhabit most scenes of this type are identified as workers, Murray's lone figure stands elevated on a platform observing, separate and distinct from the industrial scene. The image therefore functions in a more complex way. In the accompanying blurb, Murray's image was described as an 'imaginative treatment' in contrast to the 'realistic style' of Harold Bubb.[116] *Building a Bomber* can be placed within the romantic style of art favoured by the WAAC. In this image Murray drew on the sublime, a device associated with the earlier phase of romanticism. Terror is

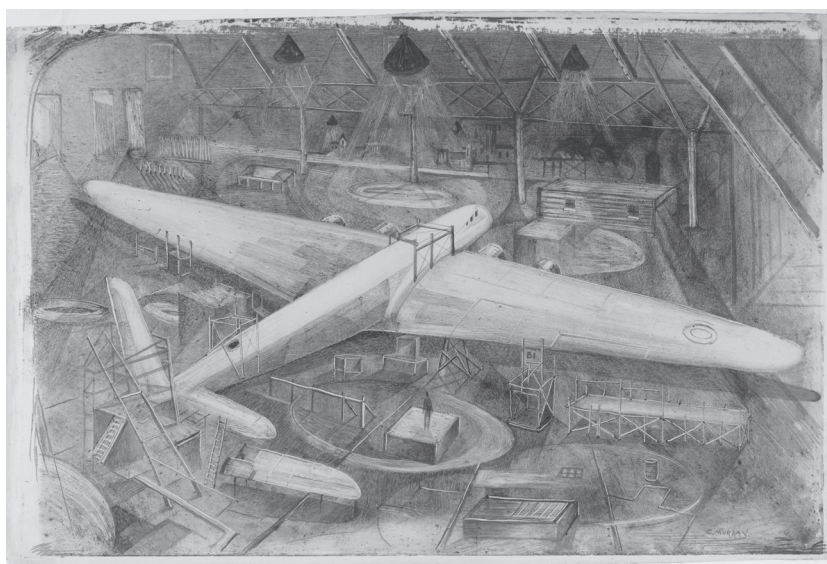

Figure 4.12 Charles Murray, *Building a Bomber Aircraft*, 1941. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

central to understandings of the sublime. For Edward Burke 'whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime'.[117] Just as the human figure was inserted into the landscape to indicate the sublimity of nature, here Murray juxtaposed the small and vulnerable human figure against the immensity of the bomber. Through this relationship the fragility of the human body in modern warfare is emphasized. While the human form appears weak and powerless, the bomber in contrast appears strong and powerful. It therefore pays tribute to the might of Britain's industrial war machine. The hint of fear is contained within an image that reaffirmed ideas of the nation the state sought to project.

A similar process of containment is evident in more direct representations of the air raid. In the 1941 WAAC exhibition catalogue, the shelters in Henry Moore's *Tube Shelter Perspective* (Figure 4.13) were described as 'regimented, as only fear can regiment, helpless yet tense'.[118] This acknowledgement of fear was unusual, not just in the WAAC collection, but in official representations of air raids in general. Nevertheless, the fear is not like the panic seen in images of the raid in the 1930s and suggests the way that the wider

Figure 4.13 Henry Moore, *Tube Shelter Perspective*, 1941. Courtesy of the Tate.

propagation of stoicism-shaped experience. Moore's fear is brooding, quiet, restrained and unspoken, suggesting the problematic nature of the open expression of fear. The constant recourse to ideas of courage and bravery fostered an atmosphere in which it was hard to openly express fear. Fear remains present, felt but unsaid. It lurked just beneath the surface and emerged in times of stress. Despite the incongruity of these moments with wider constructions of Britain at war, artists documented this sense of tension and the difficulty of openly expressing fear. However, they did so within certain parameters thereby reinforcing behavioural codes about fear and broader narratives of the British at war.

Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated the accord between the WAAC's representation of aerial bombardment and its wider propagandist portrayal. During the phoney war, artists painted a picture of Britain ready and prepared for the expected attack, and as the bombs began to fall, they transformed the civilians of Britain into a stoic citizen army, united by their shared experience of sheltering and endurance. The representations of these themes cannot be viewed as purely propagandist. As the world rearmed, British culture became saturated with images of air wars, real and imagined. These terrifying images shaped people's idea of war and fuelled their fears. The war which came was not accompanied by the apocalyptic air strike imagined. The panic predicted did not materialize and morale remained generally high, steadied by repeated reminders of the strength of British defences. A certain amount of camaraderie was fostered under fire and there were many instances of bravery and courage in everyday life. Propagandists seized on these useful aspects of experience and re-presented them within a national narrative of heroic citizenship. Mass Observers noted the similarity between the wartime London they witnessed and the representations they encountered in the popular press. On his first visit to London since the Blitz, one man commented that 'all new experiences today seemed to be spoiled by Picture Post. … [London was] exactly like what [I] had imagined and seen pictures of'.[119] Cultural images framed the way that people experienced the Blitz. Angus Calder has highlighted the fusion between everyday life and the mythology of the Second World War:

> Believing that they were 'making history' in harmony with the Absolute Spirit of 'England' … people tried to believe as that spirit seemed to dictate. Heroic mythology fused with everyday life to produce heroism. People 'made sense' of the frightening and chaotic actualities of wartime life in terms of heroic mythology, 'selecting out' phenomena which were incompatible with that mythology. But, acting in accordance with this mythology, many people – not all, of course – helped make it 'more true'.[120]

Public representations of the nation at war provided an interpretive framework for people to make sense of their more fractured individual encounters with the war and to provide explanation, meaning and broader social resonance. Some, such as the

woman from Maida Vale, even recomposed their own experiences in dialogue with public representations. Propaganda established social norms and propagated ideals of citizenship, making certain emotional responses to the war, such as fear, problematic to express. For those who lived in rural areas or towns that escaped bombing, media representations were the primary way by which they experienced the Blitz.[121] The experience of war was therefore an experience that was continually worked and reworked in dialogue with cultural frameworks. Propagandists were sensitive to the reception of their work and the shifting public mood, adjusting and fine tuning their message in dialogue with the tenor of experience. Propagandist constructions of the nation at war were not separate and distinct from lived experience. Propaganda was informed by experience and shaped the way that individuals understood and made sense of the wider war. Therefore, in producing images that accorded with propagandist portrayals, the WAAC artists were recording a fundamental part of the experience of living through the Blitz.

Nevertheless, experiences, such as death, the destruction of home and fear, were difficult to map onto the broader rubric of the state's presentation of blitzed Britain. Despite the broad correlation between the WAAC's depiction of the air raid and its wider propagandist portrayal, artists working for the committee also recorded these more submerged narratives of living through the Blitz. Britain as the victim of aerial violence was of course only one side of the air war. As the next chapter will discuss, representations of Britain as the perpetrator of aerial violence were very different.

5

The bombing of Germany

Between 1939 and 1945, Bomber Command dropped nearly a million tons of bombs on Germany. The number of German casualties is disputed, with estimates ranging from 300,000 to 600,000.[1] Of the 125,000 men who flew with Bomber Command, 55,573 were killed.[2] The cost of sustaining these operations was huge in terms of finance, materials and industrial manpower. Despite the considerable slice of the war effort that Bomber Command consumed, this aspect of the Second World War is either ignored or significantly underplayed in popular accounts of the war, which tend to focus on the home front, on Britain as the victim, not as the perpetrator of aerial violence. As Angus Calder describes:

> Bomber Command had to be left out of the Myth of the Blitz, or mythology would have ceased to be efficacious. The heroism of the British under bombardment was quasi-Christian – its great symbol, after all, was St Paul's dome flourishing above the flames. The myth could not accommodate acts, even would-be acts, of killing of civilians and domestic destruction initiated by the British themselves, however they might be justified strategically.[3]

In contrast to the marginalization of Bomber Command today, during the war itself the force was frequently depicted in the public sphere. More attention was devoted to Bomber Command than Fighter Command. In part this was because the spotlight on Fighter Command was largely limited to the period before 1941, while Bomber Command gained in importance as the conflict progressed. It also reflected a realization that Britain must be represented as doing more than just surviving and enduring the enemy attack and instead be presented as actively engaging the enemy to secure victory. Until D Day, the main way in which this could be done was through the actions of Bomber Command.

Yet the representation of Bomber Command was problematic. After characterizing the German bombing of Britain as barbarous, it was impossible to be entirely truthful about the nature of British bombing strategy, particularly regarding the area bombardment of cities and the deliberate targeting of civilian morale. In order not to destabilize the wider oppositional construction of the war, propagandists had to strike a delicate balance between reassuring the public that the RAF was taking the battle to the enemy heartland while maintaining that the actions of Bomber Command had not degenerated into mere terror bombing. Although the true nature

of the raids was evident in the press, throughout the war the government denied that the RAF was deliberately attacking civilians and steadfastly maintained that the British bombed only legitimate military and industrial targets. While the MOI often told a selective truth, when it came to the nature of British bombing strategy in Germany, Ian McLaine argues that 'they were not above stretching the truth to the threshold of lying'.[4] Because the presentation of the bombing of Germany was so highly regulated, it is a particularly fruitful area in which to consider the relationship between the WAAC and the broader propagandist portrayal of the war. This chapter positions the war artists' depiction of the bombing of Germany within the evolving relationship between British bombing strategy and its representation. It finds that while there was a broad correlation between the wider presentation of the bomber's war and its representation by the WAAC, there were significant exceptions. In the most enduring image of the campaign, Paul Nash recorded a frank representation of the violence and destruction wrought by area bombardment and in doing so captured the moral ambivalence felt by many Britons towards the RAF's actions over the cities of Germany.

Wartime nationhood and the evolution of Bomber Command, 1939–41

The propaganda value of Bomber Command was appreciated from the very earliest stage of the conflict. On the 4 September 1939, filmmaker Michael Powell was on hand to film the force's first engagement of the war, an attack on the German Navy at Wilhelmshaven. Actual footage of the squadrons on the runway was interspersed with a dramatized reconstruction of the raid to form a central sequence in *The Lion Has Wings*. The opening of the film emphasized the contrast between British and German society, and the values that were at stake in the war. Britain, we are told, is a country committed to peace and freedom. To illustrate this, we are shown idyllic images of sheep grazing on the downs, a village church nestled among the hills and Kentish oast houses. Pastoral music rises in the background, but is abruptly interrupted by the beating of war drums as the film cuts to Germany, characterized by urban scenes of men marching and mass rallies. While Britain was committed to peace, Germany embraced war and violence. Only now that war had been forced upon the nation would Britain reluctantly unleash its formidable striking force. After the outbreak of war is announced, *The Lion Has Wings* cut to show the viewer the bomber force nestled in the English countryside. The narrator stressed:

> Whether we like it or not, it was war. An unbelievable catastrophe had visited this peaceful countryside. But we were prepared. Behind each bushy hedgerow a battleship of the sky stood ready: massive, forbidding, deadly, the symbol of modern power, waiting for the word to go … . Sky battleships, armed and equipped with all that military science and technical skill could devise. Messengers of havoc, yet it had not been our will that sent them forth.

The representation of the bomber in the countryside was a common trope in propaganda. While this recorded the physical transformation of the landscape engendered by the expansion of the RAF, these images also functioned on a symbolic level. As described in Chapter 1, during the interwar period, rural imagery was central to imaginings of Englishness and at the outbreak of war this vision was mobilized, as in *The Lion Has Wings*, as evidence of the essentially peaceful nature of the nation. While Britain had not sought war, now that it had come, this image was modified by the addition of the bomber to forge a new sense of wartime nationhood. Although this sought to reassure the population of the might of Britain's military power, by harnessing the peaceful associations of the countryside, the image was carefully calibrated against the representation of a belligerent Germany. In contrast to the aggressive militarism of the Nazis, Britain was presented as a strong and formidable but essentially defensive military power.

Artists working for the WAAC articulated this sense of wartime nationhood. Charles Cundall's depiction of the force (Figure 5.1), although serene, suggested the power of the aircraft by the contrast between their imposing forms and the small figures scurrying beneath. A queue of aircraft ready themselves for take-off, while another bomber passes overhead, emphasizing the strength of Britain's striking force. Nevertheless, the image of the bomber, which had inspired such fear and apprehension during the interwar period, is contained within a pastoral landscape, muting its overtly aggressive connotations; a crew loll beneath the shadow of its wing. While showcasing the formidable might of the striking arm of the RAF, the scene is peaceful rather than militaristic and violent.

The Lion Has Wings stressed the legitimate nature of the bombing campaign. Wilhelmshaven was 'a heavily protected naval base, a legitimate target of modern warfare, an objective bristling with anti-aircraft guns and guarded with fighters'.

Figure 5.1 Charles Cundall, *Stirling Bomber Aircraft: Take-Off at Sunset*, 1942. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

Bomber Command, it was claimed, would not indiscriminately bomb civilians or target 'unfortified towns'. This was largely true in the initial phase of the conflict. On the day that war broke out, President Roosevelt called upon the warring nations to publicly affirm that they would not bomb civilians or unfortified cities. Not wanting to anger a potential future ally, and given that Germany was estimated to have 1,500 long-range bombers compared to Britain's paltry force, the government reaffirmed that it would not target civilians or cultural property in the hope that this would delay a German air attack and buy more time to strengthen Bomber Command. Chamberlain reiterated in parliament that 'whatever be the lengths to which others may go, His Majesty's Government will never resort to the deliberate attack on women, children and other civilians for purposes of mere terrorism'.[5] Although the government maintained this line throughout the war, the inability of the RAF to hit precise targets without sustaining massive casualties meant that strategy soon evolved towards the area bombardment of cities and civilians.

The Lion Has Wings presented the attack on the Germany Navy as an unqualified success. In a dramatized sequence, the targets are easily located. The plane swoops down, drops its bombs precisely and blows the enemy ship out of the water. Returning for home, the bomber encounters some German fighters, but these pose little threat and are shaken off. As we watch the footage of the actual bombers returning from this attack, it is described as 'an epic of the sky, carried out with brilliant dash and matchless courage'. In reality, things went rather differently to the script. The twenty-nine bombers that took off that day soon encountered bad weather and most lost their positions. Ten bombers returned to base having been unable to locate the target. Another Wellington went so far off course that it dropped its load on the Danish port of Esbjerg, 110 miles north of the target. Those that did find the battleships had great difficulty in accurately striking and most bombs missed the ships. The few that hit the ships failed to explode and bounced off the deck and into the sea. The only significant damage was caused by a Wellington crashing into one of the boats. The heavy defensive barrage caused the loss of seven planes.[6] Bomber Command continued to suffer high losses as it maintained its attacks on the German Navy through the remainder of 1939. At night, however, it was found that the bomber had a far greater chance of evading the air defences, but this greatly exacerbated difficulties in locating and accurately striking the target. Given the urgent need to conserve Bomber Command's forces, it was decided in April 1940 to largely limit operations to night, despite the forces' inability to strike precisely in darkness.[7] This was therefore a key step in the transition towards area bombardment, and as the bombers' war intensified in the following months, urban centres themselves would be designated as targets.

The escalation in bombing was triggered by several factors. After the Fall of France in June 1940, aerial bombardment became the primary way to directly engage the enemy. Although Churchill's 'so few' speech is traditionally associated with Fighter Command, a far larger proportion discussed Bomber Command. Churchill argued that the bombing of Germany was the 'most certain, if not the shortest, of all the roads to victory'. He pledged that bombing 'will continue upon an ever-increasing scale until the end of the war, and may in another year attain dimensions hitherto undreamed of'.[8] The escalation of British bombing was also in response to the perceived increase

in aerial violence perpetrated by the Nazis. On the night of the 24 August, a group of Luftwaffe bombers overshot their target and accidently bombed London. The War Cabinet ordered a retaliatory attack and the next night a group of bombers was sent to Berlin. Although the material effect was negligible, intelligence reports suggested it had a great morale effect. Berlin therefore continued to be bombed whenever possible, and although the stated targets were its electric and gas supplies, the directive stated that 'the primary aim of these attacks will be to cause the greatest possible disturbance and dislocation both to the industrial activities and to the civil population generally in the area'.[9] Little more than a year after Chamberlain had assured parliament that Britain would not use bombing to terrorize the German population, civilian morale was explicitly stated as a target.

As the Blitz intensified, Bomber Command was increasingly directed to target urban centres. Further evidence had accumulated of the force's inability to precisely strike assigned targets. Examining a series of raids conducted against oil refineries, a report of November 1940 concluded that less than 65 per cent of bombers dispatched had found their target. Photographic reconnaissance indicated that the refineries appeared to have sustained little damage and the absence of bomb craters in the surrounding area indicated that the bombers had missed by quite some distance. In light of this, the Air Staff began to realize that precision bombing of such small targets was not at that time operationally viable and Bomber Command's efforts were redirected to large and recognizable targets, such as the industrial centres of towns such as Hanover, Bremen, Cologne and Hamburg.[10] In July 1941, this operational shift was officially recognized as policy. A new directive instructed that Bomber Command must focus its efforts on the dislocation of the transport system and 'the morale of the civil population as a whole and of the industrial workers in particular'.[11] The area bombardment of large urban centres to destroy civilian morale was now the official strategic objective of Bomber Command.

A more aggressive tone in propaganda was adopted in the year 1941. During 1940, propagandists had sought to emphasize that 'Britain can take it' and highlighted both the barbarity of German attacks and the courage and strength of the British people. As the year drew to a close, there was a general feeling that this line had run its course.[12] The MOI worried that it had bred a complacent attitude among sections of the population who 'do not expect from themselves much beyond an ability to "take it"'. A new fighting spirit must be forged that will guard against falling civilian morale and inspire support in America. It was decided that the new propagandist theme should be 'Britain will win'. The primary way in which it was felt that this sentiment could be demonstrated was by showing that the bombing of Germany was destroying war industries and breaking civilian morale.[13]

To create this new and more aggressive rhetoric, the MOI turned to Harry Watt, whose film *London Can Take It* had been central to the creation of the rhetoric they wanted to displace. *Target for Tonight* was released in July 1941 and defined the ways in which Bomber Command would be presented to the public for the remainder of the war. It positioned the bomber crew as an ideal embodiment of the people's war. The film followed the adventures of a single crew, F for Freddie, on a raid over Germany. The close bond between the airmen is highlighted by the friendly banter

that passes through the intercom and the unspoken co-ordination of their activities. After the aircraft is attacked and the wireless operator injured, we are shown other crew members tenderly caring for him, offering reassurance through humour. This reinforced the intimate bond of friendship formed between these men. It was not simply the unity of the crew that was stressed, but also its diverse makeup. *Target for Tonight* starred actual members of Bomber Command. When casting the roles, Harry Watt deliberately chose a Scot, a Canadian and an Australian. Their accents also revealed that they represented a range of social classes. This emphasis on crew diversity was not purely propagandist. While the wartime expansion of the RAF had caused Fighter Command to recruit from a greater range of class backgrounds, this process was far more pronounced in Bomber Command. Not only were more people needed for the seven-men crews of the heavy bombers, but navigators, wireless operators and bomb aimers needed a technical rather than academic background. This meant that those from the lower classes were often better qualified for the job than public school boys.[14] Bomber Command was also a truly international service, drawing together crew from neutral countries, occupied Europe and the Empire. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Madras Presidency, the United Provinces, Ceylon, Hyderabad, Rhodesia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, the Straits Settlement, Jamaica, East India, the Federated Malay States, Gold Coast and Australia all had their own squadrons. Canada by the end of the war had its own group.[15] While there was a certain tension between ideas of the people's war and the individual heroism of fighter pilots, the diverse nature of crews meant that Bomber Command sat comfortably within the egalitarian ethos and was an ideal vehicle through which to represent the nation, Empire and other oppressed nations united in the pursuit of victory.

Propagandists returned repeatedly to the unity and diversity of Bomber crews. Later films such as *The Big Blockade* and *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* featured virtually identical scenarios. The Air Ministry's official account of the first phase of the bombers' war likewise foregrounded this idea. Unlike the individualistic qualities needed by the fighter pilot, the pamphlet stressed:

> A bomber, unlike a fighter, is flown not only by the pilot but also by the air observer, the wireless operator and the air gunner. They form a team and the success or failure of the flight depends on the closest and most intimate co-operation of all on board. … The same spirit and practice of co-ordination is required of a bomber crew as on the crew of a racing eight or the members of a football eleven. To rewrite the old saying, their motto is, and must be, 'United we fly, divided we fall.' This lesson has been learnt by the men of Bomber Command from the very beginning. More than anything else it is the secret of their success.[16]

Artists working for the WAAC also focused on this theme. While the committee acquired no images of groups of fighter pilots, there are several group portraits of bomber crews. Laura Knight's *Take Off* (Figure 5.2) conveys the physical intimacy of the crew in the confined interior of the bomber. Each member is engaged on their own specialist task: the two pilots run final tests on the instrumentation; the navigator studies the maps, plotting the route they shall be taking; and the wireless operator

Figure 5.2 Laura Knight, *Take Off*, c.1943. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

tunes in the set. While they each have an independent function to fulfil, their success and lives depend on their close cooperation as a team. This is emphasized by the overlapping of the crew's bodies. They are posed as a single and powerful unit.

Target for Tonight proved particularly popular, both in Britain and America, making a profit of £73,000.[17] It was also groundbreaking in technique. It was the first wartime film to harness a narrative-documentary style. It borrowed dramatic conventions from conventional cinema to develop narrative, tension and characters. Yet the illusion of reality was created by the use of real people as actors and a functional mode of storytelling. The film made much of its realistic credentials. The opening titles announced: 'This is the story of a raid on Germany – how it is planned and how it is executed. Each part is played by the actual man or woman who does the job – from Commander-in Chief to Aircrafthand. In order, however, not to give information to the enemy, all figures indicating strength have been made deliberately, misleading.' It was not, however, just the figures that were misleading; apart from the cast there was very little in the film that was realistic. Nevertheless, it was read as such by the critics. The American paper *Variety* praised the film saying it 'is the most realistic picture to

come out of the current European war'.[18] For *Picturegoer* the 'thrill of this picture is the reality of it'.[19]

Target for Tonight misrepresented the campaign in several respects. The targets for tonight, it was stressed, were all legitimate military objectives: an oil dump, the Kiel docks and military barracks. There was no indication that by this stage of the war Bomber Command was focusing its attacks on densely populated industrial centres. We follow the crew of F for Freddie as they make their way across Germany to bomb an oil dump. They have little problem finding the target and drop their bombs precisely. 'Bull's eye!' the bomber exclaims. On the ground we see trains and oil tankers explode. As cinema audiences watched this film in the summer of 1941, the RAF learnt the extent to which problems of navigation and targeting remained. The Butt Report of August 1941 used photographic reconnaissance to assess the success of Bomber Command's operations thus far. The news was not encouraging. It indicated that information gathered from crews was considerably exaggerated. Of those that reported having hit their target, only a third had actually got within 5 miles, and this figure decreased to just a fifteenth on moonless nights.[20] In addition, these raids continued to exact a heavy toll in terms of men and machines. The danger of operations was severely underplayed in representations. In *Target for Tonight,* for example, the only plane damaged was F for Freddie, but it managed to limp home. No plane was lost in the operation. This was an unlikely story. In August 1941, of the 3,344 night bombers dispatched, 166 either went missing or had crashed. Between September 1940 and September 1941, 3,460 operational crew were killed, 906 taken prisoner and a further 600 wounded.[21] Given that these raids had achieved so little, the Butt Report caused some concern as to the overall viability of the offensive. The report consolidated the lessons which had been learnt from the early experience of bombing. Precision bombing was at present operationally unfeasible. To be effective, Bomber Command must direct its forces towards area bombing. Even this would only be truly successful with a larger strike force. The decision was therefore taken to limit the operations of Bomber Command for the autumn and winter of 1941 and launch a renewed and concerted attack in the spring when the new heavier bombers, equipped with better navigational aids, would be operational.

Firestorms and the language of ruins

A new directive issued on 14 February 1942 marked the advent of the most violent and destructive phase of Bomber Command's campaign over Germany. The time was ripe, it declared, to employ an effort 'without restriction'. The primary object of operations, it instructed, 'should now be focussed on the morale of the enemy civil population and in particular, of the industrial workers'. The directive also advocated the use of 'concentrated incendiary attacks'.[22] An investigation was carried out in September 1941 into the comparative damage done to British and German towns. Seeing that German raids appeared to be more effective with a similar number of explosives, the Air Staff realized that 'the greater damage achieved by the enemy is caused by incendiarism'. Speaking to the fire services, it was discovered a heavy concentration of incendiaries at the beginning of the attack was particularly effective. In light of this, Bomber

Command were instructed to carry around 25,000 to 30,000 incendiary bombs to be dropped at the opening phase of attacks, followed by high explosives to prevent the fires being tackled and target emergency workers.[23] In this way, it was hoped and later proved, that the maximum amount of damage would be inflicted by the strike force.

A week after the February directive was issued, Arthur Harris was appointed head of Bomber Command. He was more than eager to carry out such directions. Harris's first demonstration of the levels of destruction that could be exacted on a city came at the end of March 1942. Lübeck was chosen as a suitable target because it had a high proportion of wooden buildings and was therefore particularly vulnerable to incendiaries. The resulting fire could be seen from 100 miles. Nearly 50 per cent of the city was destroyed and over 1,000 died. Within a month this spectacle was repeated on another small medieval city. In three raids between the 23 and 26 April, 70 per cent of Rostock was destroyed.[24] Harris was keen to demonstrate that similar levels of destruction could be exacted on much larger cities. He therefore amassed a force of 1,000 bombers with the aim of striking and destroying a single important city. On the 30 May he launched this aerial armada against Cologne. Five and hundred forty tons of high explosive and nine hundred and fifteen tons of incendiaries were dropped in under 3 hours. A third of the city was destroyed.[25] These attacks were a powerful demonstration of the destruction that Britain's striking force could wreak through the concentrated bombardment of a city.

During the first half of 1942, Bomber Command's operations shifted into a far more violent phase, with the explicit objective of attacking civilian morale. To what extent was this transition acknowledged? Government pronouncements denied that there had been any shift in strategy. When questioned in the Commons as to whether the RAF had been instructed during the raids on Lübeck and Rostock to target residential areas, Sinclair, the Secretary of State for Air, maintained that the attacks had been directed at armament factories and that any damage to residential dwellings was incidental.[26] There was, however, some indication of change in the official Air Ministry account of this period. The bombing of Cologne forms the triumphant finale of the book *Bomber Command Continues*, released in August 1942. The text lingered over the scale of devastation caused, describing it as 'extreme' and compared the sight of the fire to a volcano, one of nature's most devastating phenomenon. In the aftermath of the raid, it reported, Cologne from the air appeared as a 'dead city'. Civilian casualties, while acknowledged as being heavy, are mentioned only in passing. Emphasis instead was placed on the destruction of factories and systems of transportation and communication. An accompanying photograph showed only a devastated industrial site, giving the illusion of precision bombing. The text boasted that the cathedral was spared, inviting comparison with German actions in Coventry.[27] Although it hinted at the violence being perpetrated by the RAF, it maintained that there had been no renunciation of the promise to bomb only legitimate targets of war, in contrast to the terror bombing pursued by the Nazis.

The increasing amount of violence was acknowledged in the press. On 20 April 1942, the *Sunday Express* gloated that 'Germany, the originator of war by air terror, is now finding that terror recoiling on herself with an intensity that even Hitler in his most sadistic dreams never thought possible'. The 1,000 bomber raids were particularly

celebrated. The *News Chronicle* crowed that 'the German people must be made to feel in their own brick and bones the mad meaning of their rulers' creed of cruelty and destruction … by the ferocity of our retribution we can convince them at last that violence does not pay and induce them to become good citizens of the world'.[28] In more restrained tones, the *Times* reported that the conflagrations were visible over the North Sea, the city was in ruins and refugees were fleeing in their thousands. The 'first blasts of the whirlwind that Hitler, who sowed the wind at Warsaw and Rotterdam, has now to reap have raised the spirits of the fighters for freedom'.[29] Although carefully contextualized within a narrative of German aggression, the newspapers made clear to the public the real nature of the bombing campaign.

In the spring of 1943, with a newly equipped bomber force, the RAF exacted an increasing toll of violence. While the 1,000 bomber raid on Cologne in 1942 killed 486 and made a further 45,000 homeless, an attack of 600 bombers on the night of the 3 July 1943 killed 4,377 and made 230,000 homeless.[30] Even this degree of carnage was soon to be overshadowed by the aptly named Operation Gomorrah. The aim of this operation was to demonstrate the awesome power of the combined forces and launch an attack that would reduce a whole city to ashes. The city chosen was Hamburg. Throughout the final week of July 1943, the RAF struck at night and the American Air Force by day. On the night of 27 July, Bomber Command ignited a massive firestorm. As W. G. Sebald describes, the fire

> snatched oxygen to itself so violently that the air currents reached hurricane force, resonating like mighty organs with all their stops pulled out at once. The fire burned like this for three hours. At its height the storm lifted gables and roofs from buildings, flung rafters and entire advertising hoardings through the air, tore trees from the ground and drove human beings before it like living torches. Behind collapsing façades the flames shot up as high as houses, rolled like a tidal wave through the streets at a speed of over 150 kilometres an hour, spun across open squares in strange rhythms like rolling cylinders of fire. The water in some of the canals was ablaze. The glass in the tramcar windows melted; stocks of sugar boiled in the bakery cellars. Those who had fled from their air-raid shelters sank, with grotesque contortions, in the thick bubbles thrown up by the melting asphalt. … When day broke, the summer dawn could not penetrate the leaden gloom above the city. … Horribly disfigured corpses lay everywhere. Bluish little phosphorous flames still flickered around many of them; others had been roasted brown or purple and reduced to a third of their normal size. They lay doubled up in pools of their own melted fat, which had sometimes already congealed.[31]

Nearly 35,000 were estimated to have died on this night alone.[32] When the raids finally ceased on the 3 August, nearly 75 per cent of the city was destroyed.[33] Although precise casualty figures remain uncertain, at least 42,000 corpses lay in the ruins and a million refugees fled the city in the aftermath of the largest raid the world had yet borne witness to.[34]

The Hamburg raids were widely reported in the British press. *The Daily Telegraph* claimed that 'Hamburg has had the equivalent of 60 "Coventry's"'.[35] It admitted that

the greatest damage was caused to residential property and put the casualty figure at more than 58,000.[36] Such extensive destruction to life and property was, the paper asserted, the deliberate result of new tactics designed to swamp the defences and it frankly described the firestorm:

> The terrific heat causes a vacuum of air in the bombed districts, and air rushes from other parts of the town. In this way tornadoes arise. They are so strong that people were thrown flat on the ground, and the fire brigades cannot get to the blitzed areas with their equipment. These violent currents of air help to spread the fire to surrounding districts. … A number of people there died through lack of oxygen caused by the terrible heat. Hamburg has excellent shelters … but it was found on opening some that though they were undamaged, many people had died from suffocation.[37]

It was emphasized that this raid was of a totally different nature to those that Britain had endured. As one RAF officer quoted said, in 'comparison the enemy raids on London were child's play. What is going on at Hamburg can be repeated on any target we select. Hamburg is the first to be dealt with.'[38] The government also warned that this was just a taste of things to come. A widely circulated press statement of August 1943 promised that 'at least 50 of Germany's main cities will meet the fate of Hamburg by Christmas'.[39] Churchill threatened future escalation. Until victory is secured, he proclaimed, 'there are no sacrifices that we will not make and no lengths in violence to which we will not go'.[40]

Despite the emergence of such bellicose rhetoric, the government continued to deny that there had been any change in strategy. In December 1943, MP Richard Stokes asked, 'Whether the policy of limiting objectives of Bomber Command to targets of military importance has, or has not, been changed to the bombing of towns and wide areas in which military targets are situated?' Sinclair, Secretary of State for Air, maintained that 'there has been no change of policy'.[41] Similar denials were heard in the Lords. In response to a challenge by Bishop Bell, Lord Cecil assured the house that 'the Royal Air Force has never indulged in pure terror raids, in what used to be known as Baedeker raids of the kind which the Luftwaffe indulged in at one time on this country'.[42] In a pamphlet entitled *Aerial Bombing – The Facts*, the MOI admitted that civilian casualties increased as the bombing of Germany intensified. Nevertheless, it maintained

> incidental damage of this type, heavy though it may in fact be, is a very different thing from the deliberate terror-bombing of civilians. Germany has believed from the very beginning in terror-bombing as a short cut to victory – the ruins of Warsaw, Rotterdam, Belgrade and the City of London bear witness to this. … Many thousands of Germans will owe their lives after the war to the fact that, given ample opportunity and provocation, BRITAIN CONTINUED TO SET HER FACE AGAINST TERROR BOMBING.[43]

Although the true nature of the RAF's campaign was clear from the frank reporting in the press, the government and the MOI refused to acknowledge the strategy now pursued by Bomber Command.

These denials angered Harris. In a series of letters in the autumn of 1943, Harris complained to the Air Ministry that the nature of the campaign was being misrepresented by the 'continued suggestions that Bomber Command is concerned, not with the obliteration of German cities and their inhabitants as such, but with the bombing of specific factory premises'. He was concerned about the effect this had on airmen:

> Our crews know what the real aim of the attack is. When they read what the public is told about it, they are bound to think (and do think) that the authorities are ashamed of area bombing. It is not to be expected that men will go on risking their lives to effect a purpose which their own Government appears to consider at least as too disreputable to be mentioned in public.

He urged that the officially sanctioned aim of the Combined Bomber Offensive 'should be unambiguously and publicly stated. That aim is the destruction of German cities, the killing of German workers and the disruption of civilised community life throughout Germany.'[44]

This letter prompted a broad discussion within the Air Ministry about both how Bomber Command should be represented and what exactly the aims of the bombing campaign were. The Air Council reminded Harris that the principal objective remained the German war economy. While attacks on industrial cities would necessarily cause heavy casualties, 'your directive neither requires nor enjoins direct attack on German civilians'. Although the distinction was subtle, they emphasized its importance in the battle of public opinion: it was 'desirable to present the bomber offensive in such a light as to provoke the minimum of public controversy'.[45] Harris furiously retorted:

> If the authorities are in any doubt that cities including everything and everybody in them … are the objectives which Bomber Command in accordance with its directive is aiming to destroy, they should at once be disabused of this illusion, which is not merely unfair to our crews now but will lead to deplorable controversies when the facts are fully and generally known. This is not merely a matter of publicity policy … it concerns the whole aim and scope of the activities of Bomber Command, since unless my interpretation … is accepted without ambiguity or evasion of the issue, it is clear that our crews are being sacrificed in a deliberate attempt to do something which the Air Council do not regard as necessary or even legitimate, namely eliminate entire German cities. … It is not enough to admit that devastation is … an incidental and rather regrettable concomitant of night bombing. It is in fact produced deliberately. …This is the truth which cannot be denied.[46]

At this point the Air Council conceded that while the aim of the offensive was the German war economy, the practical effects of this policy 'cannot be distinguished from a policy of attacking cities as such'.[47] Nevertheless, they reiterated the importance of making such a distinction when presenting the campaign to the public. 'War itself is regrettable. So too are almost all the consequences of war and the conscience of

all humanitarian people, and not merely a negligible minority, would be shocked if such a misdescription were applied to the objects of our attacks as to lend colour to the German description of them as 'terror' raids'[48] This was therefore primarily a disagreement about publicity rather than strategy. While Harris worried about the consequences of not openly declaring the objectives of the campaign, the Air Ministry was aware that the presentation of the bombers' war was a delicate issue. Despite the fact that the real nature of the raids was easily inferred from newspaper reports, they feared that a frank disclosure of Bomber Command's objectives would arouse widespread hostility. After using the tactics pursued by the Luftwaffe during the Blitz as evidence of the Nazi's barbarity, it was indeed difficult to admit that British strategy differed only in magnitude.

Harris's concerns about how the bombing of Germany might be projected to posterity were partially realized in the aftermath of the now infamous attack on Dresden in February 1945. While we know with hindsight that the war in Europe was soon to be over, things looked rather different at the time. The German army was showing an unexpected capacity for resistance, particularly during the Ardennes offensive. The V2 attacks were a reminder that new technological innovations could challenge the Allies current superiority. In light of the recent Russian advances on the Eastern Front, there was also an imperative to demonstrate Allied support for the Soviet endeavours and help bring the war to a swifter end.[49] One way in which this could be achieved, suggested the Air Ministry, was by launching a massive attack on one of the principal cities in the East. On the eve of the Yalta conference, Churchill pressed that the planning for such an attack be put in motion.[50] The next day Harris was ordered to start preparing for a decisive blow against Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden or Chemnitz 'as soon as moon and weather conditions allow'.[51] On 13 February, conditions were forecast to be perfect for an attack on Dresden.

Over the next three days, Dresden was subjected to the most devastating raid of the war. On the night of 13 February, 2 separate waves of RAF bombers attacked, dropping 1,471 tons of high explosives and 1,175 tons of incendiaries. As in Hamburg, the concentrated attack started a ferocious firestorm that consumed all that lay within its path. There was to be no respite for the survivors. Shortly after midday on the 14 February, the US Air Force attacked and returned again the following day to strike the final blow. Eighty-five per cent of the city was destroyed. Casualty figures remain disputed; however, most estimates suggest a range of 25,000–35,000.[52] This raid was, and is, particularly controversial. In part this is because Dresden, unlike Hamburg, was a virtually undefended town crammed full of refugees and at the very end of the war the attack appears as pure retribution. After the continental invasion, bombing was no longer the only way that war could be taken to the enemy heartland. Its notoriety also relates to contemporaneous reporting. After a briefing given at Allied HQ, a correspondent issued a dispatch stating that the Allied Air Chiefs had now made the 'long awaited decision to adopt deliberate terror bombing of German population centres as a ruthless expedient of hastening Hitler's doom'.[53] This passed through the censors and, although quickly suppressed in Britain, was widely reported in the foreign media. MP Richard Stokes raised the issue during the debate on the air estimates on 5 March 1945. Referring to the dispatch, he asked whether terror bombing was now

policy. Yet again, this was denied and it was emphasized that all attacks were waged against carefully selected targets on the basis of their military importance. The Air Staff were not 'sitting in a room trying to think how many German women and children they can kill'.[54]

Dresden marked the beginning of a process that was to become more pronounced in the post-war years: the attempt of the government to distance themselves from the actions of Bomber Command. Churchill, who had been central to the decision to bomb Dresden, issued a memo on the 28 March:

> It seems to me that the moment has come when the question of bombing German cities simply for the sake of increasing the terror, though under other pretexts, should be reviewed. … The destruction of Dresden remains a serious query against the conduct of Allied bombing. … I feel the need for more precise concentration upon military objectives … rather than on mere acts of terror and wanton destruction, however impressive.[55]

In the immediate post-war period, Bomber Command were marginalized in the official memorialization of the war. In the victory broadcast following VE day, Churchill neglected to mention the contributions of Bomber Command. Harris was the only one of the High Commanders not to be given a peerage and the airmen of Bomber Command were not honoured with a special campaign medal at the end of the war. While memorials to the actions of Fighter Command were rapidly erected, including a plaque in Westminster Abbey listing all those who died, the far greater sacrifice of Bomber Command went unrecorded in memorial form.[56] These official commemorations suggest that the bombing of Germany was an aspect of the war all were keen to forget.

It was in this context that artists were finally able to travel to the continent and see for themselves the effects of the raids. This was also the period in which the WAAC was primarily concerned with the collection of an artistic record of the war. When, in February 1945, the committee asked for an extension of its funding, the MOI was reluctant. At this late stage of the war, they saw little propaganda or publicity value in the collection. Nevertheless, they gave the WAAC a final budget of £8100 to record events of historical importance that had not yet been covered, including the bombing of Germany.[57] Freed from any obligations to produce propaganda, the WAAC was able to orientate itself solely towards the collection of artistic records. However, the images it acquired of the bombing of Germany reinforced the propagandist line that in contrast to the German strategy of terror bombing, the RAF struck only at legitimate targets.

The most prolific painter of bombed Germany was Flight-Lieutenant Julius Stafford-Baker, who toured the country in the spring of 1945 as a RAF intelligence officer. George Orwell also visited Germany in this period as a war correspondent for the *Observer*. He told readers that the damage was on a totally different scale to Britain's blitzed cities: 'To walk through the ruined cities of Germany is to feel an actual doubt about the continuity of civilisation.'[58] The paintings the WAAC purchased from Stafford-Baker communicated little of the apocalyptic scale of devastation that

he must have witnessed. Instead, his paintings acted to recast the nature of Bomber Command's actions by emphasizing precision bombing and ignoring the mainstay of their operations, area bombardment. Stafford-Baker focused on damage to industrial, governmental or military targets. The titles of the paintings made clear that the ruins depicted were legitimate targets: *A Pumping Station on the River Lippe*; *The Krupp Works at Essen; The Railway Station at Hanover; The Rhine Bridges at Wesel; A V2 Train in a Railway Cutting at Oyle; The Aircraft Works under the Templehof Air Port; The Headquarters of the SS: The Gestapo and the Security Police; The Headquarters of Goebbel's Ministry of Propaganda*; *Direct Hits by RAF Bombs on the German Air Ministry; and The Chancellery: Hitler's Headquarters in Berlin*.[59] Words in the titles such as 'pin-point bombing' and 'direct hits' suggested that these targets had been hit accurately and precisely and were not, as was usually the case, the result of blanket bombing across the area in which they were situated.[60] Contrast can be drawn between these images of the British bombing of Germany, and those that Stafford-Barker painted of the German destruction of the continent, which were also purchased by the WAAC. In Holland, for example, he recorded the destruction of *The Ancient Salt Gate* and a bombed school, while his painting *Ruined Warsaw* depicted the whole city seemingly reduced to rubble.[61] Through the language of ruins, these images reinforced the propagandist differentiation between the barbarous actions of the Nazis and the more legitimate nature of Britain's use of air power.

The WAAC acquired just a few images which depicted more general scenes of devastation. Anthony Gross and William Warden painted images of Cologne. Although both conveyed the extent of devastation, they each focused on the virtually intact cathedral.[62] While Coventry Cathedral became a symbol of Britain's suffering and endurance in the face of ruthless German bombing, during the war newspapers described Cologne Cathedral as deliberately spared to suggest that the Allies were more respectful in their bombing (whereas in fact it was likely spared as a navigational landmark).[63] Focusing on the survival of the cathedral, these artists further reinforced the perception of the difference in bombing tactics pursued by the warring sides (Figure 5.3).

Laura Knight appeared to depict the devastation of Nuremburg, but the composition of the image suggests a different reading. The ruins are not the subject of this painting; rather, the focus is on the benches of German defendants. In the background, where the Allied prosecution teams sat, we see part of the French and Soviet desks overlaid with a scene of catastrophic damage in front of a burning fiery sky. Corpses spill out of the ruins towards the defendants' bench. The image therefore encourages the viewer to interpret the ruins not as the remnants of Nuremburg, which lay outside the courtroom, but as the destruction that the Nazis wrought over Europe, further evidence of the defendants' guilt of initiating and waging a war of aggression.[64]

Even when the WAAC was freed from any obligation to produce propaganda, in its representation of war torn Europe, it amassed a selective and distorted record which accorded with the broader way that the actions of Bomber Command were being projected to posterity. In contrast to the terror tactics adopted by the Luftwaffe, the RAF were presented as precisely striking at legitimate targets only. The area bombardment of cities, which formed the mainstay of the force's activities for much of the war, went

Figure 5.3 Laura Knight, *The Nuremberg Trials*, 1946. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

largely unrecorded. There was however one artist who recorded the levels of violence Bomber Command inflicted on German cities: Paul Nash.

Paul Nash and the bomber

Paul Nash painted two scenes of the bombing of Germany and the contrast between them documented the escalation of British strategy. Although Nash desperately wished to have an opportunity to fly with the RAF, his poor health precluded it and he based his work on a series of reconnaissance photographs supplied by the Air Ministry. *Target Area* (Figure 5.4) was painted in 1940 and appears to show an attack on an industrial site or harbour. At this early stage in the war, the RAF was largely confined to military and industrial targets. Interestingly, the pattern of craters in the painting suggest that many of the bombs have fallen wide of the target, a fact discovered by the RAF in their own 1940 survey of aerial photography. Nash has therefore recorded the great

Figure 5.4 Paul Nash, *Target Area: Whitley Bombers over Berlin*, 1940. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

difficulties the force had in precision bombing, a significant factor in the escalation of bombing strategy. By 1944, when Nash painted his second picture of the bombing of Germany, British bombing had entered its most destructive phase (Figure 5.5).

Battle of Germany is a far more violent image than *Target Area,* testifying to the escalation in bombing that had occurred in the intervening years. It frankly represented the violence being inflicted on cities across Germany by 1944. *Battle of Germany* was the most abstract work that Nash produced for the WAAC. Indeed, Clark, who lavished praise on many of Nash's other works, confessed that on seeing it he felt 'apologetic bewilderment and incomprehension'.[65] The key to understanding it, as Nash explained, is that it records several moments in time within the same image. On the left-hand side, we are shown the city awaiting the attack beneath the 'baleful moon'. In the background there is a towering column of smoke, which Nash says is a recently bombed factory. This is not the target of the next raid, which will strike at the heart of the city. Nash explained that the forms in the bottom corner are intended to suggest 'familiar features – a winding river, a great Public Square, a processional road striking across a wide Park'.[66] They are sites of civilization and culture.

The centre panel depicts the raid in progress. While we don't see the bombers themselves, powerful explosions throw smoke high into the air. Crater marks litter the foreground. Conventions of perspective have collapsed. Nash described the pictorial plane itself as 'violently agitated. Here forms are used quite arbitrarily and colours by a kind of chromatic percussion with one purpose, to suggest explosion and detonation.'[67] This is a massive and catastrophic attack. The post-attack city on the right shows none of the detailing of the left. Gone is the public square, the park, the processional road. The city is now formless. All signs of human endeavour wiped out. It is therefore one of the

Figure 5.5 Paul Nash, *Battle of Germany*, 1944. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

frankest depictions of the consequences of Allied area bombardment. A blood red cloud hangs heavy in the sky. The tone Nash has chosen is particularly significant. One of the distinctive features of Nash's work is that he uses a limited palette and certain colours appear repeatedly in his work. The only other picture that uses this particular shade of red is Nash's iconic First World War painting, *We are Making a New World* (Figure 5.6).

This similarity in colour has been noted by scholars such as Charles Hall, but he argues that it had very different connotations given Nash's contrasting attitude to each war.[68] Nash was shocked by the sights he had witnessed on the Western Front and endeavoured with his art to convey something of its horror:

> Evil and the incarnate fiend can be master of this war, and no glimmer of God's hand is seen anywhere. Sunrise and sunset are blasphemous, they are mockeries to men, only the black rain out of the bruised and swollen clouds all through the bitter black night is fit atmosphere in such a land … the shells never cease. They alone plunge into the grave which is this land; one huge grave, and cast upon it the poor dead. It is unspeakable, godless, hopeless. I am no longer an artist interested and curious, I am a messenger who will bring back word from the men who are fighting to those who want the war to go on for ever. Feeble, inarticulate, will be my message, but it will have a bitter truth, and may it burn their lousy souls.[69]

We are Making a New World is a deeply ironic and pessimistic statement about the war and the nature of modern human civilization. The desolate and violated landscape bears witness to the horror, death and destruction of the last four years. The blood red cloud creeping across the frame threatens to blot out the light of the new dawn. Ultimately, however, it is somewhat ambiguous. The rays of light might pierce through the cloud, offering the hope of redemption and regeneration.

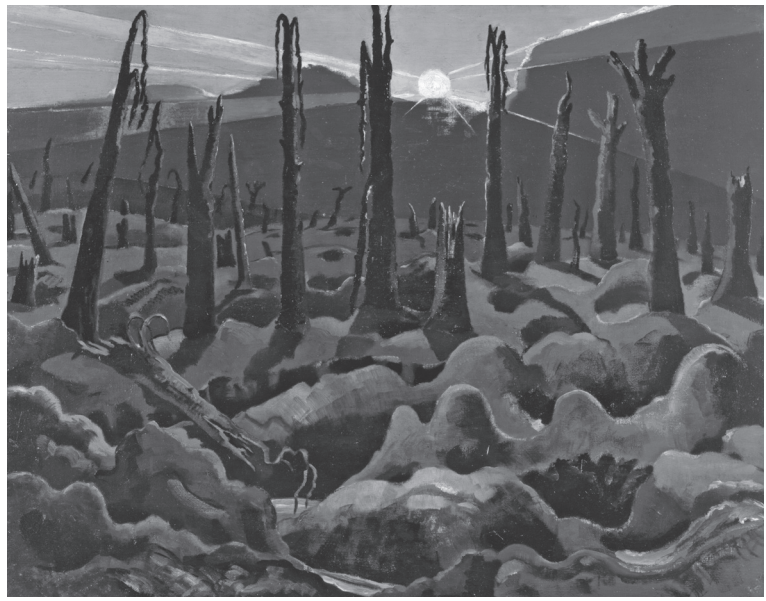

Figure 5.6 Paul Nash, *We Are Making a New World*, 1918. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

While Nash strove during the First World War to use his art to bring home the horrors of the conflict, during the Second World War he embraced a very different role. Nash was passionately opposed to Nazism because of its suppression of artistic freedom. He wanted to get involved in the war effort and hoped that he could use his art as a 'weapon' in the propaganda war.[70] This support of the war does not however preclude a different attitude to the bombing of Germany. There was certainly some degree of unease in Britain towards the bombers' war. Although membership of formal opposition groups such as the Bombing Restriction Committee was small, contemporary evidence suggests that a significant proportion of the population felt uneasy about the bombing of Germany.[71] A survey conducted by the British Institute of Public Opinion in April 1941 found that the nation was divided on the issue: 53 per cent said they would approve if the RAF adopted a policy of bombing civilians, 38 per cent disapproved and 9 per cent were undecided.[72] A survey by Mass Observation in 1944 found the nation similarly split. They reported that most people accepted that bombing would shorten the war, but still had ambiguous feelings: 'Very few people *like* the idea of these raids; very few indeed want them stopped. They are widely regarded as an unpleasant necessity, seldom as a just retribution for the raids Britain has suffered.'[73] Similar responses were elicited from the Mass Observation panel in December 1943. Few respondents were enthusiastic about the campaign; most were conflicted. One woman confessed, 'I feel all ways about it'. If it will save lives and shorten the war, she reflected, 'bomb the brutes … serves Germans right'. However, she cannot but think of 'the horrors and miseries inflicted'. She worried that the bombing 'cannot be good for the minds of the inflictors. Such savageries must be harmful to both sides.' She

exclaimed, 'Oh! I don't know how to think of it all. The wickedness and cruelty of this "Christian" world.' When thinking about the bombing campaign, one man confessed that 'I feel a sort of despair of man's sanity. Not that I would stop a lot of it if I could.' Others sensed the contradiction between the way the bombing of Britain was presented and the way that the bombing of Germany was discussed. As one man put plainly, 'If it was wrong for the German air force to bomb us, then it's just as wrong for our air force to bomb them.' Another reflected:

> The essential cruelty and wastefulness of war is revealed more clearly when one's own side is winning. During the blitz, one felt all the time that it was only what one would expect from people like the Nazis, but it seems rather terrible when one thinks of the destruction now being effected by the flower of our own young manhood, especially as now it has really got onto the scale depicted in such forecasts as 'Things to Come'. At the same time I cannot say that I disapprove on principle of bombing open towns. … One cannot help wondering where all this will ultimately lead to, however, and whether it will ever be possible to get over the bitterness of feeling which will be aroused all over the world by such wholesale destruction on both sides.

Others wondered what effect bombing had on the air crews who had been held up as exemplars of the people's war:

> If they have any imagination it must be just horrible for them – and won't make them useful members of the community afterwards – If they like doing it then I feel they are the sort of people who are a menace to any decent society. If as I suppose they do, they just regard it as an unpleasant bad necessary duty which has got to be carried out, then this becomes little more than robots, which again is not a good thing. Whatever way they look at it, there will be a terrible amount of mental readjustment to be done after the war … I think there will be many border line cases amongst … the air forces.

The bombing of Germany aroused ambiguous feelings in the population. Very few expressed an outright opposition to the bombing, none to the war itself. Yet the thought of the levels of violence being perpetrated was often deeply troubling and cast a dark shadow over the nature of the civilization that would emerge after the war. [74]

While we do not know Nash's precise attitude to the bombing of Germany, he was attuned to the violent capabilities of the bomber. He described his first encounter with the plane in his essay 'Bomber's Lair'. The narrative is tense and foreboding. As he approached an RAF base he noted the scene 'deepened in tone by the brewing of a storm which cast over the lower sky a dark wing of gloom'. The hanger appeared to him to be 'a lair, a place associated with large, wild savage beasts'. He found the bombers 'steady gaze as threatening as their huge jutting maws'. Alone he felt the panic rise and was glad when an aircraftsman appeared to break his 'fearful solitude'.[75] Nash imagined each type of bomber as its animal equivalent: the Wellington was a killer whale; the Whitley a dove of death; the Blenheim a shark; and the Hampden was a pterodactyl,

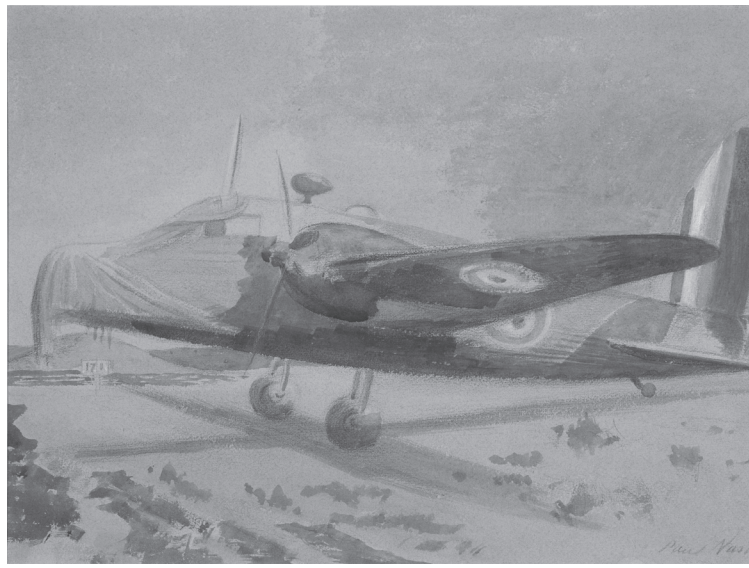

Figure 5.7 Paul Nash, *Wellington Bomber Drawn on the Day Hitler Invaded Belgium*, 1940. Courtesy of the RAF Museum.

a devil with 'great satanic nose'.[76] Nash realized this understanding visually in *Aerial Creatures,* a series of twenty images of British bombers he submitted to the WAAC in the summer of 1940 (Figure 5.7). In contrast to the serene landscape depicted by Charles Cundall, Nash's bomberscape is dark and foreboding. The front of the plane is reminiscent of a ferocious animal. Its 'eyes' look forward with steely concentration and its 'mouth' appears to almost salivate. The thin cloth covering needs simply to be removed to unleash this aerial violence. The title, however, reminds the viewer that it was Germany, not Britain, who had initiated this conflict. Nevertheless, the aggressiveness of the image and his recollections of his first encounter with the planes suggest that Nash felt some unease about the violent capabilities of the bomber.

The most compelling reason to draw comparison between *We are Making a New World* and the *Battle of Germany* is to be found in Nash's own words. Explaining the painting to the WAAC, Nash described the sky as 'shell-shocked'.[77] *Battle of Germany* should be read in a similarly ambivalent way to *We are Making a New World.* Both images confront us with a desolate landscape annihilated by modern warfare. The city itself has been totally destroyed by the bombardment. The streaks of light on the horizon suggest some optimism about the impending defeat of an enemy Nash so passionately opposed, but the blood red sky forcefully reminds us of the extreme levels of violence that enabled this victory. It therefore recorded the uneasy attitude towards bombing held by a proportion of the population and the sentiments of those who actively opposed bombing. As Alfred Salter told the Commons, if indiscriminate bombing continues 'it will become harder, not only materially but spiritually, to build a new and better world'.[78]

Conclusions

This chapter has shown that the escalation in British bombing strategy was mirrored by the emergence of an increasingly bellicose rhetoric, but this stopped short of an admittance that the RAF was directed to terrorize cities and civilians. Such a revelation, as the Air Ministry acknowledged, would have destabilized the wider projection of Britain at war. Instead, by focusing on the air crews and the planes themselves, Bomber Command was mapped onto broader conceptions of wartime nationhood. The images acquired by the WAAC accorded with this framework. Even at the end of the war, when the WAAC was freed from any propagandist obligation, the images it purchased of bombed Germany sought through the language of ruins to contrast the nature of the RAF's bombing campaign with that of the Luftwaffe, reinforcing the projection of the war as a conflict between the forces of civilization and barbarism. Despite the close correlation between war art and propaganda, in the most enduring image of the subject, Paul Nash's *Bombing of Germany*, we find one of the frankest visualizations of the bombers' war and a subtle meditation on the future of a civilization for which so much violence had been deployed to defend. Once artists were freed from the constraints of working for the state, violence and horror would forcefully reassert itself in their work.

Conclusion

In October 1945 the WAAC held a final exhibition at the Royal Academy to celebrate their activities over the last five years. During the 6 weeks it was open, nearly 20,000 people came to see the works on display.[1] This was a disappointment for the committee, as similar numbers had attended the smaller regional exhibitions during the war. Clark acknowledged that 'at no time will these pictures seem less interesting than they do at present. Their subjects belong to a past which we would gladly forget, but which is not yet remote enough to have become curious'.[2] Although the exhibition received many favourable reviews, the critics concurred with Clark's assessment. *The Scotsman* commented that in 'fifty years' time it may perhaps be exciting to have these records before one, but it is not possible to be just and critical, far less excited, at present.'[3] The greatest merit of the exhibition, it was agreed, was that it illustrated the unique record the WAAC had created. *The Times* thought that the works shown formed 'a record which will enable posterity to understand much more fully than it otherwise would the fierce and laborious ordeal through which the nation and the Empire have passed.'[4] *The Observer* commended the war artists for creating a record that went beyond the mere visual:

> They represent things which the person called an eye-witness in a law court does not see, but which are seen by the artist, sometimes after looking with his eyes and sometimes only by looking with his imagination. … Such pictures, where individual fancy transforms and sublimates the theme, are a profounder record of the war than the plain approach of the eye-witness, for they tell far more than direct transcriptions of appearance can do.[5]

While in 1945 the critics spoke optimistically about the unique qualities of the collection as record, how now do we assess the record the WAAC bequeathed?

On one level the collection documents the way that the state sought to project the British at war. Despite the WAAC's insistence that war art was not propaganda, key elements of the propaganda war resonated throughout the collection. In a war against a Nazi state who exercised total control over artistic production, the very existence of the WAAC and the impression that Britain sponsored free artistic expression was in itself useful propaganda. The ascendency of romantic art, which consciously positioned itself within the national cultural heritage, meant that war art could be presented as an embodiment of the abstract values the nation was meant to be defending. On occasions, such as in its coverage of industrial production, the committee responded to direct invitations to produce propaganda; other times it chose to ignore requests such as the Ministry of Health's demand for cheerful shelterers. Viewing the collection as

a whole, the key themes of the propaganda war are easy to detect. Eric Kennington's portraits gave a powerful visualization to the heroic few of Fighter Command. Edward Ardizzone's shelterers embodied the idea of the British unafraid and united through their collective stoic endurance of the Blitz. Laura Knight's *Take Off* echoed the way in which propagandists sought to represent the bombing of Germany and eschewed the violence of the campaign to harness the bomber crew as metaphor for the people's war. This should not perhaps surprise us. When artists, like the public at large, attempted to make their experience communicable, they drew upon shared cultural frameworks, adapting, utilizing or disregarding these constructions. Propaganda and wartime experience were mutually constitutive. To be effective, propaganda had to strike a chord with the tenor of experience. If it was effective, then it in turn shaped the way that individuals, including war artists, understood, made sense of and communicated their experiences of war. The wartime experience was an experience that was constantly being worked and reworked by propagandists. War artists captured something of this process.

There were however aspects of experience that were incongruent with and therefore absent from the official image of Britain at war, such as the fear felt during the air raid, the destruction of homes, civilian death and the violence perpetrated by Bomber Command. Although less prominent, these experiences were also inscribed upon images in the collection. The most significant omission was not the result of the demands of propaganda or censorship, but came about because the committee desired that its images should be clearly identifiable as *war* art. This meant that those more ordinary and unwarlike aspects of everyday life, such as the nature of much factory work, went unrecorded.

Kenneth Clark hoped that the WAAC's influence would extend beyond the war years, by democratizing access to and appreciation of contemporary art, and setting a precedence for the state's sponsorship of cultural production. After the Royal Academy show closed, the final act of the committee was to find a permanent home for the images it had amassed. Adverts were placed inviting applications from organizations that could allow the public to continue to view the art. The collection was eventually divided between some sixty institutions across Britain and as far afield as Canada, Australia and South Africa. Through this final distribution of its works, the WAAC attempted to ensure its legacy as a popularizer of fine art. Although no records survive that detail the rationale behind the allocation of its works, Brian Foss has noted the high proportion of works by Clark's favourite artists that went to regional museums and galleries: Twenty-two of the forty-four Nash paintings went to twelve regional institutions; sixty-nine of the ninety-six Graham Sutherlands were divided between twenty-six local galleries; twenty-four of the forty-two John Pipers; and fifteen of the twenty-seven images by Henry Moore.[6] In this, the WAAC's final act, we can again detect the influence of Clark's beliefs. One of the reasons he felt that contemporary art had such a limited audience was because it was rarely displayed outside of the major London institutions. He urged that 'concentration must give place to diffusion' so that people across the country may have the opportunity to encounter art of the finest quality.[7] Through the dispersal of war art, it was hoped that the long-term legacy of the WAAC might be secured. Walking around my local museum in Brighton today, you can see the wartime paintings of Paul Nash, Eric Ravilious, Graham Sutherland, Dorothy

Coke and others. The images commissioned and donated by the WAAC continue to form a key part of many regional museums' collections of modern British art.

Kenneth Clark continued to pursue his agenda in a number of guises after the war. The wartime foray into the state support of the arts was made permanent with the establishment of the Arts Council in 1946, which was designed to achieve similar objectives to those that Clark had long advocated. Its initial charter stated its purpose to be the development of 'a greater knowledge, understanding and practice of the fine arts exclusively, and in particular to increase the accessibility of the fine arts to the public throughout Our Realm'.[8] Clark was a founding board member and later served as chairman from 1955 to 1960. He also sought to harness the new medium of television to further his mission to make art both explicable and appealing to a popular audience. He was the first chairman of the Independent Television Authority and made several programmes for the new ITV, such as *Is Art Necessary* (1958), *The Artist in the Modern World* (1959) and *Rediscovering the Image* (1965). His greatest success was to come when he defected to the BBC to write and present the landmark series *Civilisation* (1969).

As for the artists themselves, many took a prominent role in the memorialization of the war. In the post-war period, Moore's shelterers took sculptural form and followed the journey of their subjects from blitzed London to the New Towns. Both Harlow and Stevenage acquired versions of Moore's *Family Groups*. The family unit, so disrupted by war, was reconstituted as a symbol of the aspiration for the reconstruction of a better Britain. Unveiling the Harlow sculpture in 1956, Clark commented that the 'architecture of our time was not manifested in fortresses, palaces, or even town halls, but in schools, welfare centres, and good habitations for families.' Moore's sculpture, he maintained, was 'a symbol of the new humanitarian civilisation, of which Harlow was a complete expression'.[9]

Kennington also returned to sculpture, but while Moore's *Family Groups* looked forward to a better future, Kennington completed a number of memorials to fallen airmen in which his previously restrained tendencies towards type portraiture were unfettered. He began work on the first under his own volition in 1944. Carved out of Portland stone, *1940* consists of a simplified airman's head, complete with flying helmet and goggles, on top of which stands a large symbolic headpiece. Above a pair of wings, St Michael slays the devil and beneath a mother holding a child, representing the idea of home the RAF risked their lives to defend. Similar religious imagery is seen in a private memorial to Pilot Officer Cunning. On the font an archetypal pilot stands complete with pencil thin moustache. In an identical inset on the opposite side is carving of Jesus. In these sculptures Kennington located the airman within Christian mythology, deifying the pilot and elevating their heroism to the level of religious sacrifice.[10]

Graham Sutherland also completed several works for an ecclesiastical setting, including the monumental *Christ in Glory* (1962) for the new Coventry Cathedral. Just as the destruction of the cathedral in 1940 became emblematic of the bombing of Britain, so its rebuilding acquired a wider significance. The Minister of Works wrote in 1954 that the

> Cathedral is not a building which concerns Coventry and Coventry alone. The echo of the bombs which destroyed your city was heard around the world. We

> cannot tell how many people are waiting in this country and abroad for this church to rise and prove that English traditions live again after the blitz.[11]

Basil Spence's final design was part cathedral and part memorial. The new building was built adjacent to the ruins, which were preserved to create a permanent space in the city's built environment for this symbol of suffering and survival. Dominating the new building was Sutherland's tapestry. The main image depicts Christ in Glory. Taken from the Book of Revelations, it represented the victory of the forces of good over evil, the dominant theme of much of the cathedral's symbolism.[12] Sutherland argued for the inclusion of the crucifixion at the bottom of the tapestry because he felt that the glory of the main image needed to be balanced by a scene of tragedy.[13] The crucifixion was a recurring theme in Sutherland's art in the late 1940s (see, for example, Figure C.1). He was inspired to experiment with this theme after seeing a collection of photographs taken of concentration camps. As he explained subsequently:

> The whole idea of the depiction of Christ crucified became much more real to me after having seen this book and it seemed to be possible to do this subject again. In any case the continuing beastliness and cruelty of mankind, amounting at times to madness, seems eternal and classic.[14]

For Robert Blyth, who sold a handful of images documenting his life in the Army Medical Corps to the WAAC, it was the time he spent in Hamburg towards the end of the war that prompted his version of the crucifixion. *In the Image of Man* (Figure C.2) is a deeply pessimistic picture. A putrid corpse hangs on a shattered Calvary over a bombed

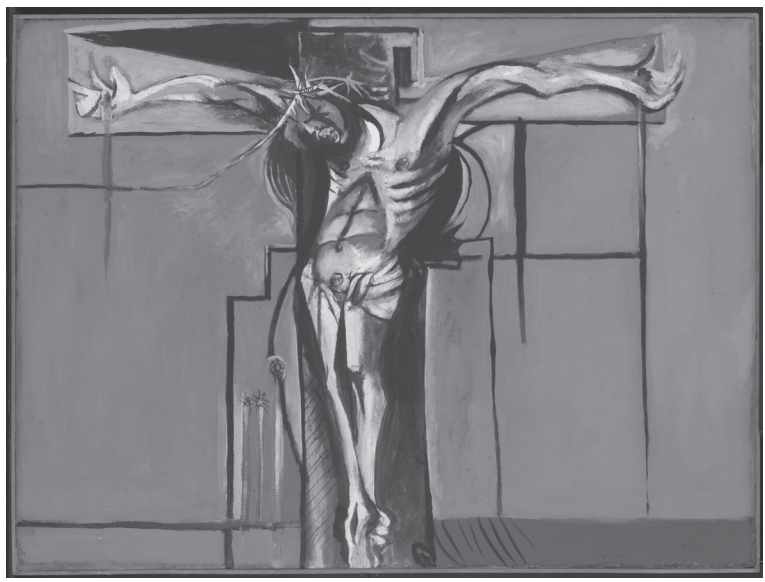

Figure C.1 Graham Sutherland, *Crucifixion*, 1946. Courtesy of the Tate.

Figure C.2 Robert Blyth, *In the Image of Man*, 1947. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

city. Strewn across the scene are the remnants of objects symbolizing civilization. The element of redemption inherent in the crucifixion is entirely absent in this painting. It presents a horrific vision of the world man has made in his image.

The theme of the crucifixion also obsessed Francis Bacon and his work epitomized the despairing tone of much British art in this period. In images such as *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944) and *Painting* (1946), the tortured and twisted bestial forms conveyed the suffering and cruelty of man. Bacon's work featured in the final issue of *Horizon,* the magazine that had done so much to promote romantic art. In the editorial, Cyril Connolly described them as 'horror-fretted canvases', before expanding the discussion to review the artistic movements of the 1940s. These, he asserts, were characterized by the struggle

> between man, betrayed by science, bereft of religion, deserted by the pleasant imaginings of humanism against the blind fate of which he is now so expertly conscious. … 'Nothing dreadful is ever done with, no bad thing gets any better;

> you can't be too serious.' This is the message of the Forties from which, alas, there seems no escape, for it is closing time in the gardens of the West, and from now on an artist will be judged only by the resonance of his solitude or the quality of his despair.[15]

Freed from the constraints of official war art, and after the final revelations of the nuclear bomb and the Holocaust, the horror and tragedy, that we can detect hints of in the wartime work of Moore, Sutherland and Nash, forcefully asserts itself. In the immediate post-war period, British art became darker and more pessimistic as artists attempted to make sense of the intense violence of war. As Sutherland explained: 'Having lived through the epoch of Buchenwald and the rest of twentieth-century violence and cruelty, it would not seem unnatural to find that one's consciousness had absorbed and been touched by these events. The subject of man's cruelty to man is, after all, a modern legend.'[16]

Notes

Introduction

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Conclusion

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